

HONORÉ DE BALZAC
THE HEARTLESS WOMAN .

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
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CHAPTER I

THE TALISMAN

TOWARDS the end of October 1829, a young man entered the Palais-Royal just when the gaming-houses were being opened, thereby complying with the law which protects an essentially taxable passion. Without the least hesitation he climbed the stairs to the gaming-house known as No. 36.

"Your hat, sir, please," said a small old man in a dry and accusing voice. He was crouching in the shadow, protected by a barricade.

When you enter a gaming-house the law commences by stripping you of your hat. Is it an evangelical and providential parable? Is it not, rather, the conclusion of some infernal contract, an unreasonable pledge of I do not know what? Would you, because of it, be obliged to keep a respectable demeanour before those who come to win your money? Do the police, who lurk everywhere in society, want to know the name of your hatter, if it has been inscribed on the lining? Or is it merely to measure your cranium on which to construct interesting statistics on the intellectual capacities of gamblers? Unfortunately, on this point, the management keep completely silent. But you have hardly taken a step inside, when your hat no longer seems to belong to you than you belong to yourself; you belong to the game, you, your fortune, your hat, your cane and your cloak. If, however, you have a new hat, you will soon learn to your cost that you must buy yourself a special "gambling-costume".

The astonishment shown by the young man when he received a numbered slip in exchange for his hat, the rim of which was happily threadbare, revealed a soul that was still innocent. And the old man, who no doubt had been crouching all his life, threw him a dull and cold glance in which a philosopher would have noticed all the miseries

of the hospital, and the vagrancies of ruined men. This man, whose long white face was no more nourished than the gelatinous soups of Darcet, presented the pale image of life at its last stages. In the wrinkles there were traces of old sufferings and, like a body on which lashes are no longer felt, nothing disturbed him. The heavy sighs of the gamblers who left ruined, their dumb curses and their stupid faces found him indifferent. He was the Game incarnate.

If the young man had studied this sad guardian he might perhaps have exclaimed: "He has only a pack of cards for a heart!" But the stranger paid no attention to this living warning, placed there at the entrance, no doubt, by Providence himself. He resolutely entered the room, where the very sound of gold exercised a dazzling fascination on greedy men. The young man was probably forced there by the most logical of all arguments written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "Yes, I can quite understand a man entering a gaming-house, but only when there is, between him and death, a last crown."

In the evening there is something vulgarly poetical about a gaming-house, like some sordid drama. The rooms are crowded with spectators and gamblers, with old men who wander in there to find rejuvenation and with agitated men who nearly always end their lives in the river Seine. The evening is a veritable concert piece in which the entire group participate, and each instrument has its appointed task. You will find many respectable people there, seeking some sort of distraction for which they are prepared to pay heavily.

Can you imagine the frenzy and torture in the heart of a man who waits impatiently for a gaming-house to open? But between the morning gambler and the evening gambler there is a difference, the difference between the unconcerned husband and the lover swooning under the windows of his mistress. With the morning comes all those palpitating tortures and the urgent need to be free of them. At this moment you will be able to recognise the true gambler,

the gambler who has not eaten, slept or dressed. At this miserable moment you will meet frightened eyes, fascinating faces and looks which by themselves could raise cards and devour them.

The gaming-houses are only decent when they are first opened. If Spain has its bull-fights, Rome its gladiators, then Paris can boast of its Palais-Royal. Only throw a furtive glance on this arena and . . . enter! . . . What nakedness! The walls, covered with crude paper to about the height of a man, do not possess a single picture which could refresh the soul. You cannot find even a nail with which to commit suicide easily. The flooring is worn and dirty, and an oblong table occupies the centre of the room. The simplicity of the stuffed chairs, crowded around the table, reveals a curious indifference to luxury by those who come there to perish for fortune or for luxury. And this anomaly is further emphasised by the strong reaction which some experience against themselves. The lover can dress his mistress in silk, in the soft muslins of the East, and, more often than not, he can claim to possess her. The merchant who vegetates in the depths of a humid and unhealthy shop is able, at some time, to erect a magnificent mansion, from which his sons no doubt will one day be driven. But is there anybody in existence worse placed than a gambler? A strange problem! Always at war with himself, deceived, with a future unknown and unpredictable, he writes his own destiny as a character of inconsequence and fable. In this world nothing is more complete or certain than misery.

When the young man entered the room some gamblers had already assembled. Three bald-headed old men were nonchalantly seated around the table, their faces like plaster and impassible like those of diplomats, revealing *blasé* souls, and hearts which had long since forgotten to flutter. A young Italian, with dark hair and an olive complexion, was leaning tranquilly on the edge of the table, and seemed to be listening intently to the secret presentiments which a gambler was shouting: "Yes . . . no!" Seven or eight

spectators, who were standing, awaited the boards that decided their luck, the looks on their faces, the movement of the gold and those of the rakes. The inevitable idlers were also there, silent, immobile and watchful as people are just before a hangman cuts off a head. A tall man, dressed in a shabby coat, held a register in one hand and, with the other, marked the stakes on the red and the black. He was a modern Tantalus who lived on the border of all the enjoyments of the age, one of those avaricious but penurious men who played an imaginary stake, a species of folly which consoled his miseries while caressing a chimera. Seated before the board were a few of those shy speculators, experts in the game, who, like released convicts no longer afraid of imprisonment, were there to hazard three tries and immediately retire with their winnings, by which they probably lived. Two old servants walked indifferently about the room with their arms folded, while the dealer and the banker stared wanly at the gamblers.

When the young man opened the door there was a sudden profound silence and curious heads were immediately turned towards the new entrant. How strange! The old men turned pale, the servants stood petrified, and the spectators, even the Italian, experienced I cannot say what appalling feeling. Is it necessary to be unhappy to obtain pity, to be weak to excite sympathy, or to have a sinister appearance to frighten the men in that room, where sorrow must be dumb, misery gay and despair becoming? Well, all these were combined in the new sensation which stirred their icy hearts when the young man entered. But have not hangmen sometimes known to have cried over the women whose blonde heads were cut off in the Revolution?

With the very first glance the gamblers were able to read some horrible mystery on the face of the young man. His young features were finely moulded, but the look on his face revealed desperation and a thousand shattered hopes. The gloomy impassibility of suicide . . . lent his forehead a dull and sickly pallor, a bitter smile lightly wrinkled the corners of his mouth and his face was so

resigned that it made one sick to see. Some secret nymph seemed to scintillate in the depths of his eyes, which were perhaps dulled by excessive pleasure. Was it debauchery that had stamped its vile character on this noble face, which had at one time been pure and brilliant, but was now degraded? The doctors would have no doubt attributed it to some lesion of the heart or the lungs, because of the yellow circles round his eyes and the redness of his cheeks, while the poets would have recognised in these signs the ravages of learning, the results of nights spent studiously by the glimmer of a lamp.

But something more mortal than sickness, something more pitiless than study had transformed that young head, contracted those tenacious muscles and twisted that heart which had only known study and sickness. Just as when a celebrated criminal first enters prison he is welcomed with respect by the convicts, so all those present there greeted this strange apparition and recognised in him one of their princes at the peak of his mute misery. The young man wore a well-cut frock-coat, and his cravat had been cleverly arranged to deceive one that he had a shirt. His hands, pretty like those of a woman, were of a doubtful cleanliness although, six hours ago, he wore gloves! If the servants in the room shuddered it was because the innocence of youth was still visible in those slender features and in those naturally curled blond hairs. The face was only twenty-five years old, and the appearance of vice seemed to be an accident. Youth struggled with the ravages of an ineffectual lewdness. Gloom and light, nothingness and existence combined to produce, at the same time, grace and horror. The young man entered the room like some lost angel who had been misled on the way. And all those retired professors of vice and infamy, like a toothless old woman who pities the beautiful young girl who offers herself to corruption, were on the verge of shouting: "Get out!"

He walked straight up to the table, straightened himself, and, without the least calculation, threw down a piece

of gold which rolled on to the black. Then, like those strong men who abhor uncertain chicaneries, he glared calmly at the dealer. The stake was too high for the old men, but the Italian, seized by some fanatical thought which made him smile to himself, pushed his pile of gold towards the centre of the table. The banker began to shout those stock phrases which are soon converted into a raucous and unintelligible noise. The dealer laid out the cards and ~~secretly hoped the young man would win,~~ indifferent though he usually was to the fortunes of the gamblers. Each spectator hoped to see a drama, and the last scene close on the fate of the piece of gold. Their eyes, fixed on the fatidic board, sparkled, but, in spite of the attention they showed, were unable to perceive any sign of emotion on the cold and resigned face of the young man.

"Red, even, pass," said the banker officially.

A strange rattling noise could be heard from the throat of the Italian when he saw the folded notes, which the banker threw towards him, pile up one by one. As for the young man he only realised he was ruined when the rake was extended to gather his last coin, which, as swiftly as an arrow joined the pile of gold with the banker. The stranger slowly closed his eyes, and his lips became pale. But, almost immediately, he opened his eyes again, his lips regained their colour and he affected the air of an Englishman for whom life has no mysteries. Without a single imploring glance at the spectators he silently disappeared from the room. How many events occur in the space of a single second, how many things in a throw!

"That was probably his last coin," said the *croupier* after a moment's silence, holding out the piece of gold to his assistants.

"Only a burning head throws itself into the water," remarked a customer looking at the gamblers around him.

"Bah!" exclaimed a servant helping himself to some tobacco.

"If we had only followed his lead!" said one of the old

men pointing to the Italian, who with trembling hands was counting his notes.

"A voice whispered in my ear," he said, "that I should win against the despair of that young man."

"He's not a gambler," replied the banker. "Otherwise he would have divided up his money to increase his chances."

The young man walked out without claiming his hat, but the old watch-dog, who had noticed its tattered condition, returned it to him without uttering a word. He returned the numbered slip mechanically and descended the stairs whistling *Di Tanti Palpiti* so feebly that he himself could hardly hear the beautiful notes.

He soon found himself under the galleries of the Palais-Royal, passed Saint-Honoré Road, took the road to the Tuileries and crossed the garden undecidedly. He walked as if he were in the middle of a desert, was elbowed by men whom he did not see, and could only hear, across the popular clamour, a single voice, the voice of death. And finally, he was lost in a benumbing brown study, like that which seized those criminals who were once conducted in a cart towards that scaffold which was red with the bloodshed since 1793. (The failures of a multitude of people have no dangerous consequences because, like children, they fall from a low height to hurt themselves. But when a great man is broken, he must fall from a great height, from the skies itself, where he catches a glimpse of inaccessible paradise.) Indeed, the forces which urge a soul to demand peace at the mouth of a pistol must be implacable. How many talented young men, weary of the vulgar crowd and the gold which they worship, cribbed and confined, break down and perish for want of a friend or a consoling woman. It is only when this happens that suicide makes its fantastic entrance. Between a voluntary death and the fecund hope which draws young men to Paris, God alone knows how many abandoned poems, stifled cries and abortive masterpieces clashed. Each suicide is a sublime and melancholy poem. Where, in the whole

ocean of literature, in any surviving book, could you find anything to compare with this short paragraph?

"Yesterday, at 4 o'clock, a young woman threw herself into the Seine from the Bridge of Arts."

Before this laconic sentence, all dramas and novels, turn pale, even that old frontispiece, *The Lamentations* of the illustrious King of Kaernaven, who was imprisoned by his children. This last remaining fragment of a lost book was the only sentence which made Sterne, who himself forsook his wife and his children, cry . . .

A million similar thoughts, which passed incoherently through his mind, assailed the stranger. If, for a moment, he cast aside the heavy thought of suicide and stood before some flowers whose heads were feebly balanced amidst a mass of thick verdure, he was suddenly seized by a desire to live. He lifted his eyes to the sky and the grey clouds, which sadly traversed it, once again assured him that death was to be preferred.

He walked towards the Royal Bridge dreaming of the last thoughts and actions of his many predecessors. He smiled when he recalled that Lord Castlereagh had satisfied the humblest of his needs, and that the Academician, Anger, had searched for his snuff-box when he was on the verge of death. He analysed these oddities and was questioning himself when, in order to let a porter pass he leant against the parapet of the bridge and dirtied his sleeve; he was surprised to find himself carefully brushing the dust away. Reaching the end of the arch he stared at the sinister water.

"A bad time to drown oneself!" said a ragged young woman laughing. "The Seine is dirty and cold . . .!"

He replied by a wan smile which revealed the folly of his own courage. But he suddenly shivered when he saw, some distance away, a board on which was written, in letters about a foot high: **HELP TO THE ASPHYXIATED.** M. Dacheux would, no doubt, be ready with his philanthropy and would lose no time in bringing that help which must anger drowning persons. He could even now see him arousing the curious and searching for a doctor. He read the obituary

notice in the paper, wedged in between the description of some feast and the flashing smile of a dancer. He could hear the Prefect of Police counting the money for his body. Dead he would cost fifty francs, but living he was only a talented man without protector or friend, without a home or a name, a social zero, useless to the State, which was indifferent.

Death in broad daylight did not appeal to him and he resolved to die during the night, to deliver up an obscure body to that society which had ignored the greatness of his life. He continued his walk, therefore, and moved towards the Quai Voltaire, affecting the indolent bearing of an unemployed man killing time. When he descended the steps at the end of the bridge his attention was drawn to the books exposed for sale on the pavement. It would be unnecessary for him to buy any. He smiled philosophically to himself and put his hands into his pockets. He was about to resume his careless amble when suddenly he heard the fantastic sound of coins at the bottom of one of his pockets. A smile of hope lit up his face, slid from his lips to his forehead and made his eyes and cheeks sparkle with joy. (This spark of happiness, however, merely resembled that flame which runs along the edge of an already burnt out piece of paper.) His face assumed its former sadness when, after having withdrawn his hand out quickly, he discovered that he possessed only three miserable sous.

"Please, sir, give me a sou for some bread," said a young chimney-sweep, whose swollen face was black.

Two feet away from the young Savoyard a sick and miserable old man, indecently clothed in rags, said in a hollow voice:

"Please, sir, give me anything you wish . . . I will pray to God for you . . ."

But when the young man turned towards the beggar, the latter immediately fell silent, recognising on that funeral face a misery more bitter than his own. The stranger threw his coins to the child and the old beggar

and left the pavement: he could not endure the poignant atmosphere of the Seine.

"We shall pray to God that you may live long," the two beggars said.

When he arrived before a bookseller's, the stranger met a beautifully dressed young woman coming down the steps. He stood for a moment and contemplated her delicious figure and white face, harmoniously set off by an elegant satin hat. Her slender waist and pretty movements captivated him. Her dress, which was now and again nimbly lifted by her feet, allowed him a sight of her legs, whose fine contours were emphasised by tightly-drawn stockings. The young woman entered the shop, bargained for some albums, a collection of lithographs and bought them for several pieces of gold which sparkled and jingled on the counter.

The young man, apparently engaged in examining the prints exposed for sale in the show-case, stared at the girl and, now and again, exchanged a surreptitious smile. But, for him, it was goodbye to love and the girl! That last smile was not understood, did not move the heart of the girl, did not make her blush or lower her head. What did it mean to her? Merely one more admirer, which in her vanity would suggest the thought: "I must have looked nice to-day." The young man walked away and returned in time only to see her climbing into her carriage. The horses trotted away and the last image of luxury and elegance was eclipsed, as he was going to eclipse his own life.

He walked sadly past the shop windows, examining without interest the goods laid out. When the shops bored him, he studied the Louvre, the Institute, the towers of Notre-Dame and the Palais and the Bridge of Arts. These monuments, reflecting the grey, menacing clouds which hung above Paris, assumed a melancholy aspect. Nature herself seemed to conspire to plunge the dying in an ecstasy of unhappiness. He felt his whole body shaken by some malevolent force, and he saw buildings and men as if in a fog in which everything floated. He wanted to flee

from the reactions produced on him by physical nature, and made his way towards an antique shop to divert his thoughts, and wait for the night bargaining for some *objects d'arts*. It was, so to speak, like gathering courage before taking the final plunge, as criminals do when taken to the scaffold. But, for a moment, the consciousness of approaching death gave the young man the assurance of a Duchess who has two lovers, and he entered the antique shop with a jaunty air—the fixed smile of a drunkard on his lips. Perhaps it was the intoxication of life—or death! But his former dizziness soon returned, and he began to see everything around him in strange colours and an easy animation, the source of which was to be found in the irregular circulation of his blood, which now bubbled like a cascade and was now as calm and tranquil as a sluggish river.

In the shop he saw a fresh, chubby-faced young boy with red hair and the shopkeeper, an old peasant woman, a female Caliban, busy polishing a pan which shone like the genius of Renard Palissy.

"Oh, sir!" she said, "we have very ordinary things down here, but if you care to climb to the first storey, you'll see some beautiful mummies from Cairo, inlaid pottery and ebony sculpture . . . true Renaissance . . . recently arrived . . . they are really beautiful!"

In the horrible position in which the stranger was, this Cicero babbling these stupid mercantile phrases seemed to him like the mean torments by which shallow fools send a genius to his death. But he was prepared to carry his cross to the end, pretended to listen to the woman and replied only by gestures and in monosyllables. He was thus able to meditate without fear of interruption. He was a poet, and his soul met an immense pasturage. He could see before him the ruins of twenty worlds.

The shop, at first sight, appeared to him as a confused picture in which everything seemed to dance and leap about. Crocodiles, monkeys and snakes smiled from the stained glass windows of a church, appeared to be running

on the surface of a lake or climbing up chandeliers, a Sèvres vase, on which Madame Jacotot had painted the portrait of Napoleon, stood next to a sphinx. The beginning of the world and the events of yesterday were joined together in a fantastic and grotesque manner. A turnspit was placed on a monstrance, a Republican sword on a hatchet of the Middle Ages; Madame du Barry, painted in pastel by Latour, naked, and in a cloud, seemed to be contemplating a Turkish pipe and trying to divine the utility of some spirals which curled towards her. Weapons of death—swords and pistols—were thrown pellmell with those of life, soup tureens in porcelain, Saxe plates, translucent saucers from China, salt cellars and feudal comfit dishes. An ivory ship moved forward with full-blown sails on the back of an immobile turtle. A pneumatic machine blinded the Emperor Augustus, who stood majestically impassible. Several portraits of French aldermen and Dutch burgomasters, unfeeling now as they were during their life, were to be found at the bottom of this chaos of antiquities, from where they stared coldly. All the countries in the world seemed to have contributed some rubbish of their sciences, some sample of their art. It was a philosophical dung-hill which lacked nothing, neither the calumet of the savage, the green and gold slipper of the seraglio, nor an idol from Tartary. There was even the tobacco-pouch of a soldier, the ciborium of a priest, and plumes from a throne. The peculiar interplay of light and shade lent them all a strange animation, so that one almost seemed to hear smothered cries and to witness unfinished dramas. They were all covered lightly by an obstinate dust.

The stranger at first compared these rooms, which were replete with cultures, divinities, masterpieces, royalty, debauchees, reason and folly with a many-faceted mirror, each of which represented a world. After this hazy impression he wanted to make a choice, but a fever suddenly seized him, due perhaps to the hunger which gnawed at his stomach. The sight of so many individual and national lives, proved by those tokens which had survived them,

benumbed the senses of the young man. The desire with which he had first entered the shop was exhausted. He felt that he had really died, climbed by degrees to an ideal world in an enchanted palace, where the universe appeared as a ball of fire, just as the future at one time appeared before the eyes of John in Pathmos.

A multitude of heads, beautiful and horrible, obscure and clear, lifted themselves out of the fog of generations. Egypt, rigid and mysterious, dressed in sable, was represented by a mummy. And then there were the Pharaohs and Moses, the Hebrews and the desert—he caught a glimpse of them all, ancient and solemn. Fresh and suave, a gleaming white marble statue reminded him of the voluptuous myths of Greece and Ionia. Who would not have smiled to see the brown young girl, on the slender Etruscan vase, dancing before Priapus, whom she greets so happily? Even the whims of Imperial Rome were revealed, the bath, the couch and the toilet of an indolent Julia, waiting dreamily for her Tribulle. The head of Cicero evoked memories of free Rome, and consuls, lictors, purple-bordered togas filed slowly past him like vapourous figures in a dream. Finally, Christian Rome was revealed to him. An artist opened up the heavens for him and he was able to see the Virgin Mary in a cloud of gold, surrounded by angels and eclipsing the glory of the sun. When he touched a mosaic of the different lavas of Vesuvius and Etna, his mind was immediately carried into the very heart of warm and tawny Italy. He was present at the orgies of the Borgias, ran in the Ambruzzes and aspired to the love of an Italian girl whose white face and large black eyes captivated him. He shuddered when he saw a dagger of the Middle Ages, whose hilt had been wrought like fine lace, and the rust of which resembled drops of blood. India and its numerous religions lived again in an idol with a pointed hat and adorned in gold and silk. Near this grotesque figure lay a mat which still exhaled the odour of sandal. A monstrous figure from China, with twisted eyes and distorted mouth and limbs, awakened the mind to the inven-

tions of a people who, tired of the uniformity of beauty, derived ineffable pleasure in creating varieties of ugliness. A salt-cellar from the workshop of Benvenuto Cellini took him back to the Renaissance, to the time when art and immorality flourished, when sovereigns amused themselves by torturing others and when prelates, lying in the arms of courtesans, decreed chastity for simple priests. He saw the conquests of Alexandria on a cameo, the massacres of Pizarro on an arquebus, and the wild and cruel wars of religion in a helmet. The smiling images of chivalry sprang from an armour from Milan, well polished, under the visor of which the eyes of a knight-errant still seemed to shine.

This ocean of furniture, fashions, works and ruins was an endless poem to him. Shapes, colours and thoughts were revived, but no plot was to be found. The poet had to complete the sketch in which the great painter, who had created this immense canvas, had disdainfully thrown together the innumerable incidents of life in confusion. After having become master of the world, after having contemplated various countries, ages and reigns, the young man returned to the lives of individuals. The lives of nations became too oppressive for a single soul, and he personified himself in various characters.

A sleeping infant in wax recalled the joys of his own childhood. At the enchanting sight of a half-naked Tahitian girl, his burning imagination elaborated the simple life of nature, the chaste nudity of true modesty, the delights of idleness so natural to man and a calm future beside a fresh and dreamy river, without culture and civilisation. But suddenly he became a privateer and saw a terrible poetry in the figure of Lara, who lived inspired by the pearly colours of a thousand shells and the Atlantic hurricanes. When, however, he saw the delicate miniatures and the blue and gold arabesques which enriched a precious manuscript, he forgot the tumults of the sea. He was gently wooed back to a desire to study science, and longed for the hard life of monks, free from sorrows and pleasures, merely lying in the middle of a cell and contemplating from their windows, the

woods and the vineyards of the monastery. In turn he became a soldier and a worker, found himself playing cards, surrounded with beer; and smiling at some attractively plump peasant woman. He shivered when he saw snow fall in Mieris and fought with himself when he saw a combat by Salvator Rôsa. He met a tomahawk from Illinois, felt the scalp of a Cherokee and declared his love to a Squire's wife seated by a Gothic fireplace in semi-darkness. He shared all the joys and the sorrows of that now dead world and he became so much a part of it that his footsteps sounded as if they were from another world, like the confused noises of Paris heard from the Towers of Notre-Dame.

Climbing the steps which took him to the rooms of the first storey he saw shields, panoplies, sculptured tabernacles and wooden figures ranged along the wall. He found himself being suddenly pursued by the strangest forms and finally doubted his own existence because, like those curious objects which surrounded him, he felt neither entirely alive nor dead. When he entered the new room the light began gradually to die, but the resplendent piles of gold and silver which he found there hardly needed it. The most costly whims of dead debauchees were to be found in that vast bazaar of human follies. Humanity was to be seen in all the pomp of its misery and all the glory of its gigantic pettiness. An ebony table, sculptured after the designs of Jean Goujon, which must have taken several years of work, was disdainfully heaped beside precious caskets and fairy-like pieces of furniture.

"This must cost millions!" exclaimed the young man.

"One thousand millions!" replied the fat boy. "But this isn't all, come to the third storey and you'll see!"

The stranger followed the boy to the third floor and, immediately, several pictures by Poussin, a sublime statue by Michael Angelo, some ravishing landscapes by Claude Tarrain, a Gerard Dow, which resembled a page from Sterne, Rembrandt, Murillo and Velasquez, all in turn sombre and coloured like a poem by Lord Byron, passed successively before his tired eyes. Then, finally, there were

those masterpieces which seem to have been accumulated to create hatred for the arts and to kill enthusiasm. He stood before a disgusting picture of the Virgin by Raphael, and a portrait by Corregio which did not deserve so much as a glance. An inestimable vase in antique porphyry, the sculptures of which represented the grotesque licentiousness of the Romans, hardly evoked a smile. He felt suddenly oppressed by the debris of fifty vanished centuries and sick with the luxury and art which had smothered human thought. They all seemed to rise like malicious spirits to engage him in an endless battle. Like those caprices of modern science, which embodies creation in a gas, could not the mind compound some terrible alchemy by the rapid concentration of its pleasures and the strength of its ideas? Have not men perished by some moral acid spreading destructively through their bodies?

"What does this box contain?" he asked standing before a large mahogany cabinet.

"Ah, you have the key to it, sir," replied the fat boy mysteriously. "If you want to see it, I won't stop you."

They looked at each other for a moment and then the boy, having interpreted the stranger's silence as a wish, left him alone with the cabinet.

Have you ever been thrown into the immensities of space and time by reading the geological works of Cuvier? Carried away by his genius, have you ever soared above an endless abyss, sustained by the hand of a magician? When it discovers, layer by layer, under the quarries of Montmartre, or the slaty ashes of the Urals, the fossilised remains of animals that belonged to long-dead civilisations, the mind is startled to discover the passage of thousands of millions of years and the existence of millions of animals that have been forgotten, and the ashes of which, accumulated on the surface of our globe, bring forth flowers and food. Isn't Cuvier the greatest poet of our century? Lord Byron, by his works, has produced some startling moral reactions, but our immortal naturalist has reconstructed worlds with bones; rebuilt, like Cadmus, cities out of a few teeth;

repeopled a thousand forests with the mysteries of zoology and rediscovered whole populations of giants in the feet of a mammoth. He is truly a sublime poet. He digs a piece of gypsum, sees an imprint, and cries: "Look!" And suddenly the stone comes to life and a whole world unrolls itself! After innumerable dynasties of gigantic creatures, races of fish and clans of molluscs comes at last man, a degenerate product of a grandiose species. Brought to life by the glance of the Creator, these pitiful men were able to leap over chaos and shape the progress of the universe in a sort of retrograde Apocalypse. In the presence of this dreadful resurrection, the result of the voice of a single man who has thrown us into this nameless infinity which we call time, we cannot but feel pity for ourselves. We ask ourselves, crushed as we are under the ruins of so many forgotten worlds, what good our triumphs, our hatreds and our loves do, and if it is worth accepting the sorrows of life to become an intangible point in the future? If we are detached from the present we become dead and meaningless.

The marvels of almost all known creation, which appeared before the young man, had a strange enervating effect on him, and he wanted more than ever to die. He fell into a curule chair and glanced around at the phantoms in the panorama of the past. The pictures lighted up, the faces smiled at him and the statues came deceptively to life. The shadows in the room, combined with the feverish torment in his mind, animated the dead figures around him. Faces grimaced grotesquely, and eyelids were lowered and opened. They detached themselves from their places, brusquely or gracefully, and in spite of the differences in their character and position, hopped about together. It was a nocturnal meeting resembling the fantastic interviews of Dr. Faust with Bröcken. But these phenomena, the result of fatigue or the unknown whims of the blood, did not frighten the young man. As far as he was concerned, the horrors of life were more terrifying than those of death. They seemed to be accomplices in shaping his last thoughts,

which still held a craving for life. There was profound silence around him and soon he fell into a reverie which followed, as if by magic, the gradually deepening darkness. And then he saw the last red glimmer of the sun in its battle against the night reflected in the room. He lifted his head and saw a skeleton which hung its head doubtfully now to the left and now to the right as if to say: "The dead don't want you yet!" He passed his hand over his tired eyes and suddenly a cool fresh breath of air brushed his cheeks and made him shiver. The windows being closed he felt that this deathly caress must have come from some bat. For one more moment the vague reflections of the dying sun permitted him a last, indistinct view of the phantoms around him, and were swallowed up in darkness. Night, the hour of death, had come. He sat for some time wrapped in a somnolent reverie, in which he lost sight of all terrestrial things, and forgot the multitude of arrows which tore at his heart. Suddenly, he thought he heard a voice and startled as when, in the middle of a nightmare, we feel ourselves being precipitated into the depths of a bottomless abyss. He closed his eyes and the rays of a light dazzled him. He saw, in the centre of a red circle, a small old man standing and throwing the light of a lamp on him. He neither spoke nor moved. There was something strange about the apparition. The most intrepid man, surprised thus in his sleep, would no doubt have trembled before the figure which seemed to have emerged from a neighbouring sarcophagus. The singular youthfulness of the eyes led the stranger to believe that the figure must be a supernatural one. Nevertheless, during the rapid interval which separated his somnambulance from his real life, he lived in that philosophical scepticism recommended by Descartes, and was then, in spite of himself, brought under the power of those inexplicable hallucinations, the mysteries of which are condemned by our pride or which feeble science tries in vain to explain.

Imagine a small, thin old man, dressed in a black velvet robe with a broad silk cord round his waist. On his

head was a equally black velvet cap and, on either side of his face, hung two long locks of white hair. The robe enveloped his body like a vast shroud and emphasised the pallor of the thin face. If it was not for the emaciated, fleshless hand, which he held up with the lamp, the face would have seemed to be suspended in the air. A grey and pointed beard hung from his chin and gave him the appearance of a Jew who served artists as models when they wanted to paint Moses. His lips were so discoloured and thin that it was difficult to discover the line of his mouth. His large, wrinkled forehead, the pale and hollow cheeks, the implacable rigour of his small green eyes, with neither eyebrows nor eyelashes, made the young man believe that Gerard Dow's. The "Gold Weigher" had walked out of its frame. The meandering wrinkles and the circular folds on his temples revealed a profound knowledge of living things. It would be impossible to deceive this man, who seemed capable of discovering the thoughts at the bottom of the most discreet minds. The customs of all the nations of the globe and their wisdom were epitomised on his cold face. You could read on it the lucid tranquillity of a god who knows everything. A painter would have turned this face either into the beautiful image of the Eternal Father or the sneering mask of Mephistopheles, because he would have discovered both supreme power on the forehead and a sneer on the mouth. This old man must have lived a lonely life in a strange part of the world, where he knew no pleasures, because he had no illusions, and where he felt no sorrows, because he experienced no pleasures. He stood erect, immobile and as steadfast as a star in the centre of a cloud of light. His green eyes, full of I do not know what calm malice, seemed to light up the intellectual world as his lamp illuminated that mysterious cabinet.

Such was the spectacle which surprised the young man when he opened his eyes after having been tormented by thoughts of death and strange figures. If he had been a thoughtless person, if he had been as credulous as a child lapping up the stories of its nurse, he would have attributed

it to the veil drawn over his life and his mind by his recent dark thoughts, to the irritation of his nerves or the violent drama staged before him like the awful delights contained in a pipeful of opium. This vision took place in Paris, on the Quai Voltaire, in the 19th century, where magic was an accepted impossibility. Although he had lived next to the house in which the god of French incredulity had died, although he had been a disciple of Gay-Lussac and d'Arago, the stranger bowed down before these almost poetical fancies, to which we ourselves often fall a prey to escape from desperate truths and to tempt the power of God. He trembled before the vision of the old man holding the lamp, believing it to be the manifestation of some strange power. But, at the same time, the emotion seemed like that he had felt before Napoleon, or in the presence of some towering genius.

"Would you like to see the portrait of Jesus Christ painted by Raphael?" the old man asked him courteously, in a clear and metallic voice. And he placed the lamp on the shaft of a column so that the box was fully lit up.

The old man then made a curious gesture and suddenly the mahogany panel slid into a groove, moved noiselessly away and left the stranger in dumb admiration. At the sight of that immortal painting, he forgot the fantasies of the shop, his own sleepiness, and recognised in the old man a creature of living flesh and once more returned to the real world. The tender solicitude and sweet serenity of the divine face soon had its influence on him. The infernal tortures which tormented him were dissipated. The head of the Saviour, with its shining aureole, stood out from the gloomy background and seemed the very source of all light. The word of life could be almost heard from the vermilion lips, and the ravishing parables retold in the profound silence. The calm simplicity of those adorable eyes, where troubled souls found refuge, had been beautifully reproduced by the painter, and the suave and magnificent smile seemed to say: "Love each other!" The painter had produced a work which was capable of inspiring a priest,

stamping out all egotism and awakening every sleeping virtue..

"Well, he found it necessary to die!" said the young man, emerging from his reverie, the last thought of which was his fatal destiny.

"Ah! Ah! I was right then to mistrust you!" replied the old man suddenly, seizing the stranger's wrists as in a vice.

"Don't be afraid," said the young man quietly, "it affects my life, not yours. Waiting for the night, when I could drown myself without any fuss, I came to see your riches. Who wouldn't allow this last pleasure to a man of science and a poet?"

The suspicious old man carefully examined the gloomy face of his false customer while he was speaking. He was soon reassured by the sorrowful voice and, having read in his features the sinister destiny which had recently disturbed the gamblers, he relaxed his grip.

"But why do you want to die?" asked the old man. "Are you bored with life, or is it merely because you are avaricious?" (*grinding*)

"You must not look for my desire to die in the vulgar reasons which dictate most suicides," replied the young man. "Because it is difficult to express my reason in ordinary language, I can only tell you that I am in the profoundest and most distressing of all miseries. And," he added proudly, "I'm in need of neither help nor consolation."

"Well! Well!" exclaimed the old man. "But I'm not going to force you to accept anything from me, neither a French centime, a parat of the Levant, a terrain of Sicily, a creutzer of Germany, a kopeck of Russia nor a farthing of Scotland, nothing, in fact that exists in gold, silver or copper—and yet, I shall make you richer, more powerful and considerate than any living constitutional king has been."

The stranger felt that the old man must be mad and sat still without daring to reply.

"Stand up," the old merchant said, suddenly seizing the lamp before the portrait. "And, now, look at this shagreen skin."

The young man rose quickly and was surprised to see hanging on the wall behind him a piece of shagreen skin not larger than that of a fox. But what surprised him most was that the skin, which was in the very centre of the profound obscurity which reigned in the shop, threw out such bright rays of light that anyone would have thought a comet had suddenly made its appearance. He approached this so-called talisman which, it was claimed, would protect him from sorrow and misery, and could not help but mentally sneer at it. His curiosity, however, was aroused and, while he bent over examining it carefully, soon discovered the cause of its singular brightness. The grains of the skin were so carefully polished and the capricious rays so clean and pure, that, like the facets of a garment, it reflected the light. He gave the old man a mathematical reason for the phenomenon but, in reply, he merely smiled. For a moment the young man believed, when he saw that superior smile, that the old man had been duped by some charlatan, but forgot him immediately and returned to the skin with the delight of a child who wishes to know all the secrets of its new toy.

"Ah! Ah!" he exclaimed. "There's the seal—it's known as the Seal of Solomon."

"You know it, then?" said the old merchant, snorting eloquently throughout his nose.

"Who could believe in this nonsense?" said the stranger angrily. "This talisman is a pure Oriental myth. It's almost as silly as believing in the existence of sphinxes or griffons."

"Since you're an Orientalist," replied the old man, "perhaps you could read this sentence?"

He held the lamp closer to the talisman so that the stranger could see, encrusted in the marvellous skin, a few lines of writing which had been so finely cut that they seemed part of the original.

"I must confess," said the stranger, "that I am at a loss to know how they have been able to engrave the letters so deeply."

He looked quickly around the room as if in search of something.

"What do you want?" asked the old man.

"Something to cut the skin with, I want to find out whether the letters have been printed or encrusted."

The old man gave him his stiletto, with which the stranger tried to cut the skin where the letters had been written. But when he had scooped out a portion, the letters remained so clear that, for a moment, he thought he had removed nothing.

"The Levant really has some secrets," he said looking dubiously at the skin.

The mysterious words were arranged in the following manner.

IF YOU POSSESS ME, YOU SHALL POSSESS ALL.
BUT THY LIFE SHALL BELONG TO ME. GOD HAS
DETERMINED IT THUS. WISH, AND THY WISHES
SHALL BE GRANTED. IT IS THERE. BUT WITH
EACH WISH I SHALL DIMINISH
LIKE THE DAYS. DO YOU
WANT ME? TAKE ME. MAY
GOD HEAR YOU.
BE IT SO!

"Ah! you read Sanskrit fluently!" exclaimed the old man. "Have you travelled in Persia or Bengal?"

"No," replied the young man, curiously touching the skin which resembled a sheet of metal in its inflexibility.

The old merchant replaced the lamp on the shaft and gave the stranger a cold, ironical glance.

"Is this a joke or a mystery?" asked the young man.

"I don't know what to say," said the old man gravely, shaking his head. "I have offered this powerful talisman to stranger men than you but, though all laughed at the

influence which it is supposed to exercise on one's future, none wanted to risk taking the oath so fatefully proposed by I do not know what power. I think, like them, I've been doubtful, and . . ."

"And you've never even tried it?" interrupted the young man.

"Tried it!" replied the old man. "If you were on the tower of Vendôme, would you throw yourself into the air? Wouldn't your life be shortened? Now, before you entered this room, you had decided to commit suicide, but suddenly something mysterious distracted your attention. What a child! Listen to me. Like you I have been miserable and begged for my bread. Nevertheless, I have lived to be 102 and have become a millionaire. Sorrow has brought me riches, and ignorance knowledge. I am going to reveal to you, in a few words, a great mystery of human life. Man exhausts himself by two actions which drain the very source of his life. Two verbs express all the forms which these two causes of death take: 'To will and to desire.' Between these two, there is another which sages have discovered, and to which I owe my happiness and my longevity. To desire burns us out like a fire, and to will eventually destroys us, but to know leaves our feeble constitution in a perpetual state of calm. Desire has been killed in me by thought and the will by the natural play of the organs. In a few words, I have entrusted my life, not to the heart, which can be broken, or to the senses, which can become deadened, but to the head, which is inexhaustible and survives everything. My feet have trampled the highest mountains of Asia and America, I know all the languages in the world, I have lived under different régimes . . . I have lent money to a Chinaman taking the body of his father as a pledge, I have slept in the tent of an Arab, I have signed contracts in all the European capitals and I have left my gold, without fear of it being robbed, in the wigwams of savages. In short, I have got everything, because I scorned everything. My sole ambition has been to see. To see . . . isn't that to know? . . . And to know,

isn't that to enjoy, young man? What remains of a material possession? A thought. Think, then, how beautiful must be the life of a man, who, having had the realities of life stamped on his mind, is able to draw his happiness from it, to enjoy its voluptuous beauty devoid of all terrestrial filth. Thought is the key to the treasures of the world, and brings with it the happiness of the miser without his cares. Everywhere in the world my pleasures have always been those of the intellect, and my debauches the contemplation of the sea, the forests and the mountains! I have seen everything, but at leisure, unhurriedly. I have never desired anything, I have always waited for it. I have walked through the world as if it were my own garden. What men call sorrows, loves, ambitions, reverses, are for me only ideas. Instead of experiencing them, I express them and interpret them; instead of allowing them to consume my life I develop them like a dramatist. Never having tried out my body, I have always enjoyed robust health. My mind having inherited all the strength I never abused, my mind is better furnished than this shop. There," he said tapping his forehead, "there are the true millions. I spend my days looking back intelligently on the past; I can invoke entire countries, places, scenes! I have an imaginary seraglio where I possess all the women I've never had, and can witness again all your wars, your revolutions and judge them. How much more preferable it is to possess the sublime faculty of being able to move around the universe, tied down by neither the chains of space nor the fetters of time, to sit on the edge of the universe and see and know all, to your febrile, easy pleasures. "This," he said, holding up the shagreen skin, "this is power and desire reunited. There are your social ideas, your intemperances, your joys and your sorrows. Is not to know the word of wisdom? And what is folly if not the excess of desire and power?"

"But I want to live a life of excess!" said the young man seizing the skin.

"Careful, young man!" said the old merchant with vivacity.

"I have led a life of study and thought," replied the stranger, "but they have not fed me. I do not wish to be a dupe to the noble preaching of Swedenborg nor to your Oriental charm, neither do I want to accept your charitable efforts to keep me in a world where my existence has become impossible. Look," he added, shaking the skin convulsively, "I want to enjoy a splendid, almost a royal, dinner, followed by a debauch worthy of the age in which they say everything has improved! And my companions must be young, intellectuals and foolishly happy! And the sparkling wines must have the power to intoxicate us for three days! And then I want this sinister power to squeeze all my pleasures into one because I must hug all the joys of heaven and earth in a last embrace and endless kisses the noise of which would soar over Paris like fire, awakening husbands in their beds and inspiring in them a rejuvenating ardour, even the septuagenarians!"

A sudden burst of laughter from the old man stopped the stranger in his mad speech, and he kept silent.

"Do you imagine," said the merchant, "that my floors are going to open and reveal sumptuously laden tables with ready-made companions from the other world? No, no thoughtless young man . . . you have signed the pact . . . all is done. Your wishes will now be scrupulously carried out, but, remember, on them depends your life. The circle of your days will be gradually narrowed according to the smallness or the exorbitant nature of your wishes. The Brahmin to whom I once lent this talisman told me that it possessed really extraordinary powers. But I must say your first wish is vulgar. In any case you want to die, don't you? Well . . . your suicide is only postponed."

"We'll see, sir," said the young stranger surprised and irritated by the old man's attitude, "what changes occur in my fortune. But since you make fun of me I hope you fall in love with some dancer! Perhaps you will then understand the debauchee and be more lavish with the things you have so carefully husbanded."

He left the room, without hearing the old man's heavy

'sigh, and descended the steps with the speed of an escaping thief, the chubby-faced boy following vainly behind him to light his way. Blinded by a sort of delirium he did not even notice that the shagreen skin had now turned as supple as a glove. He folded it mechanically and put it into his pocket. He burst into the street, nearly knocking down three people walking together.

"Fool!"

"Idiot!"

"Well, I never, it's Raphaell!"

"Good Lord, we've been looking all over for you."

"What, is it you?"

"Come along with us," said one of them to Raphael.

"But what's the matter?"

"I'll tell you, come along."

Raphael was soon surrounded by his friends who, having linked their arms in his, forced him towards the Bridge of Arts.

"My dear man," continued his friend, "we've been searching for you for over a week now. At your rooms at St. Quentin, which, by the way, is unchanged, Leonard told us you had left for the country. Do we look like bailiffs or creditors? It doesn't matter! Our love for you being too great we continued our search. We thought we might find you perched on the trees of the Champs-Élysées, or in one of those rest-houses where beggars sleep leaning against a flimsy string, or that you may have set up your bivouac in someone's boudoir. But we could find you nowhere—not even on the police books! We searched the Ministries, the Opera, the convents, the cafés, the libraries, the Journalists' Bureau, the restaurants, the theatre foyers, in short, in every respectable and disreputable place in Paris, but in the end had to resign ourselves to the loss of a man whose genius could lead him equally to the court or to prison. We even spoke of you being canonized like a July hero! But, really, we missed you!"

At this moment Raphael passed over the Bridge of Arts, from where, without listening to his friend's chatter,

he looked down at the undulating surface of the Seine which reflected the lights of Paris. He knew that the old man's prediction had already been accomplished—the hour of his death was definitely postponed.

"We missed you, really!" his friend continued. "And we were disturbed because we know you to be a superior man. Well, I can tell you something. The juggling of the political magicians under the Constitutions has become grave. The former monarch, who was overthrown by the heroism of the crowd, has been denounced as a prostitute and the country upheld as a virtuous and shrewish wife, which must, willy nilly, accept us all. But this is what you may not know! The Government, that is the aristocracy of bankers and lawyers, who today rule the country as the priests once ruled the monarchy, have found it necessary to mystify the people of France with some old ideas clothed in new words. They want to convince us that it is better to pay 1,200,000,033 centimes to the country, represented by Mr. so and so, than 1,100,000,009 centimes to a king who says I instead of we. The Opposition has been satisfied and the National Government of the citizen-king preserved. But for us, who mock at religion and liberty, the country is only a place where ideas are exchanged and sold at so much a lime, a place which swarms with prostitutes, succulent dinners and spectacles and where suppers do not end till the next day. Paris is the most adorable of all cities! It is the city of joy, liberty, intellect, of beautiful women, bad subjects and good wine . . . and we are the true followers of Mephistopheles, who fill the public mind, set right the actors, fix new boards to the Government hovel, rejuvenate the Republicans and revictual the Centre, provided that we are permitted to laugh at kings and the people and are not expected to hold the same opinion in the evening as in the morning, and to spend a happy life reclining on soft cushions. We are going to place the control of this country in your hands, that is why we are taking you to a dinner which is being given by the founder of a new newspaper. You will be welcomed there like a brother, because you will

be recognised as the fearless and uncrowned king of those censorious minds who discovered the intentions of Austria, England and Russia before Russia, England or Austria had any intentions! Yes, we have crowned you the sovereign of those great minds which give the world its Mirabeaus, its Talleyrands, its Pitts, its Metternichs and all those clever Crispins who play with the destiny of an Empire as any commoner plays a game of dominoes. Well, Taillefer, our host, has promised us a real saturnalia. He has enough money to do anything . . . are you listening Raphael?"

"Yes," replied the young man, less astonished at the accomplishment of his wish than the natural manner in which the events were linked together. Although it was impossible for him to accept the influence of magic he could not help admiring the accidents of everyday life.

"But you say yes as if you were thinking of your grandfather's death," commented one of his friends.

"Ah!" replied Raphael, so naively that his journalist friends burst into laughter. "I was thinking that we, the hope of France, are about to become rascals! Up to the present we have lived decent lives only studying men and things, but now, I'm afraid, if we enter politics, we shall lose all our ideals. When one thinks no more of the Devil we can regret the paradise of youth, that innocent time when we listened devotedly to the voice of a good priest and received the sacred body of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Ah, my dear friends, if we took so much pleasure in committing our first sins, it was because the remorse that followed would embellish them, but now . . ."

"Oh! now," said the first companion, "it remains for us . . ."

"What?" asked another.

"Crime . . ."

"That's a word which has all the height of the gallows and the depth of the Seine," replied Raphael.

"You don't understand . . . I'm speaking of political crimes. All this morning I have only envied one life . . . that of conspirators. I do not know if my whim will last

till tomorrow, but this evening our insipid civilisation fills me with disgust! The life of smugglers and corsairs captivates me. I long to go to some place like Botany Bay, to places destined for people like Lord Byron, who after dinner have nothing better to do than to blow somebody's brains out, conspire for a republic or demand a war . . ."

"Emile," said Raphael's neighbour with enthusiasm, "if it weren't for the July Revolution, I would become a priest and lead a quiet life in the heart of the country and . . ."

"And read the breviary every day?"

"Yes."

"Your'e a fop!"

"You study the newspapers all right!"

"Very badly, for a journalist! But, shut up, we are walking amidst a mass of subscribers. Journalism you will notice is the religion of modern society and therein lies its progress."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the priests are no longer believed, neither the people . . ."

And chatting thus they arrived at the apartment on Jaubert Road.

Emile was a journalist who had won more glory than the others without half their success. He was a hard critic, caustic and full of verve, who possessed all those qualities that excused his faults. Frank and mocking, he would pass a thousand sarcastic remarks before a friend, whom he would defend, in his absence, with loyalty and courage. He laughed at everything, even at himself. He was always penurious and, like all men of ability, unspeakably indolent. Full of ambitions he would never realise he had turned his glory and his fortune into a comfortable cushion on which he slept. He was as sincere as a child, and only worked by fits and starts or from necessity.

"We're going to have a merry time," he said pointing to the flowers and carpets which decorated the steps.

"I like porches decorated with carpets," said Raphael.

"Luxury from the peristyle is rare in Paris. I feel myself reborn here."

"And in there we are going to drink and laugh once more, my dear Raphael!"

They entered the room, resplendent with lights and decorations, and were soon surrounded by the most remarkable young people in Paris. One, a young painter, claimed, with his very first picture, to equal all the glories of the Imperial artist, while another, who had worked laboriously on a book, claimed that he was opening new avenues for the modern school. Some distance away stood a statue-like figure with a rugged face, chatting to one of those cold scoffers, who, according to circumstance, now recognised genius nowhere and now everywhere. Here, too, was the most intelligent of our caricaturists with his bitter, twisted mouth and malicious eye, lying in wait for epigrams. There was also that audacious young writer whose talent lay in condensing the quintessence of modern political thought. He was talking to a poet whose writings would have overwhelmed the present generation if only his talent had been as great as his hatred. In flattering each other they both tried not to tell the truth, and at the same time not to lie. A celebrated musician was trying to console a young politician who had recently fallen from grace. Styleless young authors rubbed shoulders with unimaginative poets, and poetical prose writers with prosaic poets while a poor disciple of Saint-Simon occupied himself by charitably linking together these incomplete beings. Finally, there were two or three of those savants who usually succeeded in livening up the conversation, several vaudeville-writers whose talk glittered like diamonds, which give neither warmth nor light, a few cynics who continually laughed up their sleeves and a judge who was surprised at nothing and had the temerity to blow his nose in the middle of a cavatina. Altogether among these guests, it might be said that five had a future, a dozen might obtain some glory during their lifetime, but the others, like all mediocre people, were destined for oblivion.

The host moved about the room full of the anxious gaiety of a man who knows he is spending a large sum of money and, from time to time, his eyes would wander towards the door, at the guests who still arrived. At last a small stout man appeared who was received by flattering applause; he was the notary who had only that morning, in connection with the launching of the newspaper, had the last papers signed. Immediately a servant threw open the doors to the large dining room into which each guest wandered unceremoniously to look for his place around the immense table. Before leaving, Raphael threw a last glance around the room. His wish had certainly been realised. Silk and gold adorned the room, and rich candelabras, holding countless candles, lit up the faint details of the gilded frieze, the delicate bronze carvings and the sumptuous furniture. Rare flowers, artistically arranged with bamboos, spread a sweet perfume. Everything, including the drapery, revealed an unpretentious elegance.

"Ah! this is the life I want!" said Raphael sighing. "I want to be surrounded by luxury, at least for a year, and after that I don't mind what happens. I would have at least known and exhausted a thousand lives!"

"Don't be a fool," said Emil, who had been listening. "You'll be soon tired of luxury. But prepare yourself. See," he said, majestically indicating the healthy and reassuring sight of the capitalist's dining table, "this man seems to have amassed his wealth merely for our enjoyment. I almost feel like a sponger. But isn't the style of those bas-reliefs wonderful? And look at those lights and pictures—what luxury! If we are to believe the envious, this man is supposed to have murdered a German during the Revolution. Would you credit this venerable grey-haired man with crime? He looks too much like a gentleman. Let's go then! I've a good mind to ask him if he's really an honest man . . ."

"Not now!" interrupted Raphael. "Wait till he's drunk and we've dined!"

The two friends sat down laughing. With a glance

more rapid than thought each guest paid tribute to the long sumptuous table, white as a bed of newly-fallen snow, on which was symmetrically arranged the dinner things. The crystal reflected the iris and the flames of the candles, while the food, under silver domes, sharpened both appetite and curiosity. Hardly a word was spoken. Neighbours stared at each other. The Madiera wine went round. Then the first course appeared in all its glory, and was comparable to the opening scene of a classical tragedy. The second act became a little more loquacious. By that time each guest had drunk reasonably well and changed according to his own personality. When the remainder of the magnificent courses were brought tempestuous discussions had started all around the table. Pale faces turned red, noses turned purple, faces lit up and eyes sparkled. During this dawn of drunkenness, the conversation remained within the borders of civility, but gradually jokes and witticisms began to make their appearance and, finally, calumny sweetly lifted its serpent-like head and fluty voice. Only here and there a few artful men listened attentively, hoping to keep sober. Everyone ate and spoke at the same time and drank indifferently. Taillefer took a real pride in attending to his guests, and soon brought out the terrible wines of the Rhone and Torkay. Minds, unleashed like the horses of a mail-coach, soon galloped into the vacuum of those arguments to which nobody listened, the narration of those stories which had no audience and the repetition of those questions which remained unanswered. The orgy alone raised its loud voice, a voice composed of a hundred confused noises which grew like the crescendos of Rossini. Then came the insidious toasts, the boastings and the challenges. All intellectual claims were renounced, and each seemed to speak two voices. This m  l  e of words, in which dubious paradoxes, grotesque truths and interlocutory judgments were hurled across as, in a battlefield, bullets cross each other, would no doubt have interested the philosopher, by the singularity of the thoughts, or surprised the politician by the strange number of systems.

The scene was at the same time a book and a picture. Religions, philosophies, morals, governments and psychology fell under a scythe as long as time itself, and it would have been difficult to decide whether they were being handled by drunken wisdom or by clear and wise drunkenness. Swept as if by a tempest, these minds resembled, in their efforts to discover the laws which upheld civilisations, the sea dashing perpetually against the cliffs, ignorant of the fact that it is the will of God who keeps to Himself the secret of their perpetual dissension. Furious and amusing, the discussion was a sort of tumult of intelligences. Between the dolorous witticisms made by these children of the Revolution at the birth of a newspaper, and the conversation of the happy inebriates at the birth of Gargantua could be found the abyss that separates the nineteenth century from the sixteenth. The latter destroyed itself in laughter, while the former laughs in the midst of ruins.

"Who is that young man over there?" asked the notary. "I thought I heard someone call him Valentine."

"Valentine, indeed!" said Emile laughing. "I can assure you, sir, we haven't a foundling in our midst, but the descendant of the Emperor Valens, of the Valentinois family, the founder of the towns of Valence in Spain and France, the legitimate heir to the Empire of the East. If he has permitted Muhamed to sit on the throne at Constantinople it is through sheer goodwill and lack of money and soldiers." And Emile described with his fork a crown above the head of Raphael.

The notary paused for a moment to collect his thoughts, but soon returned to his drinking with a gesture which seemed to indicate that it would be impossible for him to make the town of Valence, Constantinople, Muhamed, the Emperor Valens or the family of Valentinois a part of his clientèle.

"Isn't the destruction of those ant-hills called Babylon, Tyre and Carthage, which have always been crushed under the heels of a passing giant, a warning to man from a mocking power?" said Claude Vignon.

"Perhaps Moses, Louis XI, Richelieu, Robespierre and Napoleon are all one and the same man who reappears from time to time, like a comet in the sky," suggested another.

"But, sir, Louis XIV has been responsible for the deaths of more men in digging the aqueducts of Maintenon than the convention, justly assessing the taxes, unifying the law and equally distributing the wealth," said Massol, a young man who had turned Republican for want of a syllable before his name.

"Sir," said Morcan, a good landlord, "you take blood for wine, but will it leave anybody with his head on his shoulders?"

"With what object? Doesn't the social order value sacrifices?"

"Hell! A Republican to pretend that the head of a landlord would be a sacrifice!" exclaimed a young man.

"Men and events mean nothing," continued the Republican amidst hiccups. "In politics there are only principles and ideas."

"How horrible! I suppose you'd have no compunction in killing your friends on the slightest pretext?"

"The man who feels remorse is the true criminal because he has some idea of virtue; while the Great Father, the Duke of Alba, had systems, and the corsair, Monbârd, an organisation."

"But isn't society able to do without your systems and your organisations?" asked Canalis.

"Oh yes, at first!" said the Republican.

"Your stupid republic makes me sick! We wouldn't be able to slice a garlic without discovering the agrarian law."

"You have excellent principles, my petty truffle-stuffed Brutus! You're something like my valet. He's so obsessed with the mania of property that if I leave it to him to brush my coats I'd be naked!"

"You are brutes! You think you can set a nation

right with a tooth-pick!" replied the Republican. "But let me tell you this, justice is more dangerous than thieves."

"Well! Well!" exclaimed Descroches the solicitor.

"Aren't they annoying with their politics?" said Cardot, the notary. "Neither science nor virtue is worth a drop of blood. And perhaps if we wanted to liquidate truth we'd find it bankrupt."

"It would, I think, be less costly to amuse ourselves with evil than to quarrel with good. As far as I'm concerned, I'd give all the speeches delivered in the tribune during the last forty years for a trout, a story by Perrault or a sketch by Charlet"

"Your'e right! Pass me some asparagus. . . . Because, I say, after all, liberty is the child of anarchy, anarchy leads to despotism, and despotism leads us back to liberty. Millions have died without having been able to make a success of any system. Doesn't the world move in a vicious circle? When man thinks he has attained perfection, it will be found that he has merely changed things."

"Well, gentlemen," said Cursy, the vaudeville-writer, "I think I should now propose a toast to Charles X, the father of liberty!"

"Why not?" asked Emile. "When the law is despotic, liberty finds an outlet in morals, and *vice versa*."

"Let's drink then to the imbecility of power, which makes us give so much power to the imbeciles!" said the banker.

"At least Napoleon has brought us some glory!" said a naval officer who had spent all his life at Brest.

"Oh, glory! It has to be paid for dearly and can never be kept. Isn't it the egotism of great men, just as friendliness is that of drunkards?"

"Sir you are very"

"Both the savage and the thinker are equally horrified at the idea of property."

"Very pretty!" exclaimed Cardot. "If there was no property how could we make deeds?"

"These peas are really delicious!"

"And the next day the priest was found dead in his bed. . . ."

"Who talks of death? Be careful, I have an uncle!"

"You will resign yourself to his loss."

"It is not a question. . . ."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, listen please. . . . This is how to get rid of an uncle. Quiet! First get hold of a short fat uncle, a septuagenarian at least, they are the best uncles, and then force him to eat some *pâté de fois gras*."

"But my uncle is a tall, avaricious and sober man."

"Such uncles are monsters. . . . They abuse life."

"And," continued the man, "tell him, while he is eating, that his bank has gone bankrupt."

"But if that has no effect?"

"Give him a pretty girl!"

"But if he is. . . ." said another making a negative gesture.

"Then he's not an uncle. . . . an uncle is always sprightly."

"Malibran's voice has lost two notes."

"No!"

"Yes!"

"Ah! Ah! Yes and no! Isn't that the history of all religions, political and literary dissertations?"

"Knowledge, what beautiful nonsense it is! Mr. Heineffettermach says that more than one thousand million books have been printed, and that a man, in his lifetime, cannot read more than one hundred and fifty thousand. Could you then explain to me what knowledge means? For some it consists in knowing the names of Alexander's horse and to ignore those who may have invented ships and porcelain, while others maintain that it is to know the Testament, to lead honest lives and not to die hated and dishonoured."

"You are all drunk!"

"The immediate result of a constitution is that the mind is flattered. The arts and sciences, everything in fact, is

devoured by a leprous egotism, while your bourgeois think of nothing else but planting poplars. When despotism has been established illegally, we haven't even the liberty to bear children."

"Personality disappears," said an absolutist, "when knowledge makes all equal."

"But isn't it the aim of society to achieve the well-being of all?" asked the disciple of Saint-Simon.

"If you earn five hundred thousand pounds you will forget all about the welfare of the people. But if you are so passionately fond of humanity go to Madagascar. The people there are new to Saint-Simonism and you will be able to classify them easily. But here, each has his place, like a peg its hole. Porters are porters, and nobody encourages the simpleton to take up higher studies!"

"You're a Carlist!"

"And why not? I love despotism and hate the human race. I don't hate kings—they're so amusing!"

"But let's take a larger view of things," said the savant. "In the beginning power was essentially something material. But with the gradual growth of society governments of some sort came to assume power. Thus, in the earliest times, power rested with the theocracy; the priest held both the sword and the censer. Later, there were two priesthoods, the pontiff and the King. Today, society, which is at the last stage of civilisation, has distributed power among a number of combinations, such as industry, intellect, money and speech. Power is continually progressing towards its own dissolution. We can no longer depend either on religion or material power, but only on the mind. Does thought need a sword? That's the problem."

"Thought has killed everything!" exclaimed the Carlist. "Absolute liberty only leads nations to suicide."

"You have got nothing new to offer. Power today is ridiculed and has become as common as denying God! And the present century is like an old Sultan sunk in debauchery!"

"Do you know," said Bianchon, who was completely

drunk, "do you know that a dose of phosphorus could turn a man into a genius or a villain, an intellectual or an idiot, a virtuous man or a criminal?"

"How can you talk of virtue like that!" exclaimed Cursy. "Virtue, the subject of every play, the dénouement of all dramas, the basis of all justice!"

"Shut up, you're a fool! Your virtue is like Achilles without a heel!" said Bixion.

"Let's drink!"

"Will you bet that I drink a bottle of Champagne at a single draught?"

"They're as fuddled as carters," said a young man who was seriously engaged in pouring his wine into his waistcoat pocket.

"Yes, it's quite true, a real government is one which creates public opinion."

"Public opinion! It's the most vicious of all courtesans! Everything is true, everything is false!"

"You monster!" said Emile interrupting the misanthrope. "How can you slander society in the presence of such wines and food?"

"Is it my fault if Catholicism happens to put a thousand gods into a sack of flour, if the Republic continually throws up a Napoleon, and if royalty exists between the assassination of Henry IV and the trial of Louis XVI?"

"Shut up, you sceptic."

"Sceptics are the most conscientious men."

"They have no conscience at all."

"What did you say! They have at least two."

"Yes, discounting heaven! The old religions were merely a happy development of pleasure, but ours develop the soul and hope. That's real progress."

"My dear friends, must one wait a century to make a name in politics? What has been the fate of *The History of the King of Bohemia and His Seven Castles*...?"

"That?" cried the judge across the table. "It's just some phrases thrown together at random... a true work for Charenton."

"You're a sot!"

"You're a fool!"

"Oh! Oh!"

"Ah! Ah!"

"They're going to fight."

"No."

"Tomorrow."

"Immediately," replied Nathan.

"Why you can't even stand straight."

"Perhaps I can't, but . . ." The bellicose Nathan glanced stupidly around the table and, as if weakened by the effort, fell back into his chair and remained silent.

"Would it have been pleasant," said the judge to his neighbour, for me to have fought over a book which I have neither seen nor read?"

"Emile, be careful of your coat, your neighbour's turning pale," said Bixion.

"Kant, sir? A balloon thrown up to amuse simpletons! Materialism and spiritualism are two rackets with which charlatans play with the same shuttlecock. What God is in everything, in spite of Spinoza, or what comes from God, in spite of Saint Paul? . . . Fools! Isn't it the same movement to open or shut a door? Which came first—the chicken or the egg? . . . Pass me some duck! . . ."

"Don't be a fool," said the savant, "that has been exploded."

"How?"

"Isn't a professor's chair for philosophy and not philosophy for a chair?"

"Thieves!"

"Fools!"

"Rogues!"

"Dupes!"

"Where else but in Paris would you find such a brisk exchange of eloquence?" said Bixion in a voice between a tenor and a bass.

"Come on, Bixion, give us a classical farce! That's an order!"

"Would you like me to imitate the nineteenth century?"

"Listen everybody!"

"Silence!"

"Put a damper on his nose!"

"Quiet!"

"Give him some wine."

"Come on, now, Bixion!"

The artist buttoned his black coat up to his neck, pulled on his yellow gloves and began to sing the *Review of Two Worlds*. But the uproar drowned his voice, and it was impossible to distinguish a single word of his burlesque. If he did not imitate the century, he at least imitated the *Review* because he could not hear himself.

The desert suddenly appeared as if by magic. The table was covered by a vast *épergne* of bronze which came from the workshop of Thomire. Executed by a celebrated artist, its tall figures, acknowledged in Europe as the ideal form of beauty, supported pineapples, fresh dates, yellow raisins, blond peaches, oranges just off the ship, Chinese fruit—in fact every kind of luxurious surprise and appetising delicacy. The colours of this gastronomical picture were enhanced by the brightness of the porcelain, the shining lines of gold and the pink of the vases. Light as the liquid fringes of the ocean, cool and green, it looked like a scene by Poussin copied at Sèvres. The entire estate of a German prince would not have paid for this piece of insolent richness. Silver, mother-of-pearl, gold and crystal had been lavishly used in new forms. But the dulled eyes and feverish verbosity of drunkenness hardly permitted the guests to see this fairy-like thing worthy of an Oriental tale. The wines that accompanied the desert brought with them their penetrating vapours and enchanting perfume, which engendered a sort of intellectual mirage by chaining the feet and oppressing the hands. The pyramids of fruit were piled up, voices grew hoarse and the noise increased. Words could no longer be heard distinctly, glasses were broken, and occasional bursts of laughter splintered the air like squibs.

Suddenly, Cursy seized a horn and began to play a fanfare. This was like a signal from the devil himself. The gathering was immediately flung into a delirium of joy and sang, cried, turned red, whistled and groaned. You would have smiled to see people, otherwise gay, turn as sombre as the dénouements of Crébillon, and cunning men revealing their secrets to the curious who did not listen. Melancholy men smiled like dancers on the completion of their pirouettes. Claude Vignon strutted about like a bear in a cage, intimate friends quarrelled, and the animal resemblances inscribed on human faces, so curiously demonstrated by physiologists, appeared vaguely in the gestures and postures. The master of the house, knowing himself to be drunk, dared not rise, but, with a fixed grimace approved of the extravagances of his guests and attempted to maintain a decent and hospitable air. His large face, which had become red and blue, and terrible to see, associated itself with the general movement of the room by efforts which resembled the rolling and pitching of a brig.

"Did you really kill him?" Emile asked him.

"The pain of death disappears in the interest of the July Revolution," replied Taillefer who raised his eyebrows in a manner which was at the same time both delicate and brutish.

"But don't you sometimes see him in your dreams?" insisted Raphael.

"There's a remedy for that!" replied the murderer.

"And on his tomb," said Emile sardonically, "the sculptor will engrave the words: *PASSERSBY, SHED A TEAR IN HIS MEMORY!* . . . Oh! I'll give any mathematician a hundred sous if he could demonstrate to me, by an algebraical equation, the existence of hell. Alas! I don't know where to place my faith—with the geometry of the incredulous or the Paternoster of the Pope. Bah! Let's drink!"

"We owe to the Paternoster," replied Raphael, "our arts, our monuments, our sciences perhaps, but above all, our modern governments, in which our society is wonderfully represented by five hundred minds, whose powers are

so nicely balanced that they neutralise each other and leave all power to civilisation, that gigantic queen who has replaced the king, an ancient and terrible figure created by man between heaven and himself. In the face of so many accomplished things, atheism appears like an unproductive skeleton. What do you say?"

"I can only think of the gallons of blood shed by Catholicism," replied Emile coldly. "It has forfeited our very veins and hearts. But it doesn't matter! All men who think right march under the banner of Christ. He alone has demonstrated to us the triumph of spirit over matter, he alone has poetically revealed the intermediate world which separates us from God."

"Are you a believer?" asked Raphael throwing him one of those indefinable drunken smiles. Well, not to compromise ourselves, let's drink to the famous toast. *Diis Ignotis!*"

"If you want to retire to the salon, coffee awaits you," announced the maître d'hôtel.

At that moment nearly all the guests were sunk in that delicious state when the lights of the mind are extinguished, and the body, delivered of its tyranny, abandons itself to the delirious joys of liberty. Some, who had reached the very apogee of drunkenness, remained gloomy and troubled, ready to seize anything which proved that they were alive; while others, plunged in the marasmus produced by indigestion, were unable to move. Some intrepid men still uttered vague words, the meaning of which they themselves could not comprehend. Silence and tumult were strangely coupled together. Nevertheless, when they heard the sonorous voice of the servant announce new pleasures, the guests rose and dragged themselves across the room, supporting each other. But, when they reached the door, the whole company stood immobile and charmed. The pleasures of the feast paled before the titillating joy that the host now offered to the most voluptuous of their senses. Under the bright candles of the golden chandeliers, seated around a vermillion table, the guests suddenly saw a group

of women. Their eyes sparkled like diamonds with pleasure. The finery in the room was rich but richer still was their resplendent beauty, before which the marvels of the palace disappeared. The passionate eyes of the women, bewitching like those of fairies, were more vivacious than the flood of light which shone on the satin tapestry, the white marble or the delicate flashes of the bronze figures. The heart throbbed at the sight of their contrasting coiffures and their charming poses. They were like a hedge of flowers studded with rubies, sapphires and corals. At a glance one could see black necklaces on snow white necks, light scarves floating, like the beams of a lighthouse, in the air, haughty turbans and modestly provoking dresses. It was a veritable seraglio, which offered seductions for all eyes and pleasures for all caprices. There a diaphanous piece of gauze, here a glistening stretch of silk hid or revealed mysterious perfections. Half-hidden small feet spoke of love, and liquid red lips remained shut and silent. Frail and becoming young girls, artificial virgins whose pretty tresses breathed a religious innocence, seemed like supernatural apparitions which could disappear with a puff. Others, proud and aristocratic, slender and gracious, had their heads lowered as if they still had royal protection to buy. An Englishwoman, whose white and chaste, almost celestial, face seemed to have descended from the clouds of Ossian, resembled a melancholy angel, while a Parisian, whose entire beauty rested on an indescribable grace, sat inordinately conscious of the superiority of her toilet and mind, armed with her all-powerful weakness, supple and hard, a siren with neither a heart nor passion. You would have thought they had all come from Versailles, convoked by Lebel, and had been driven there like a band of Oriental slaves who had been awakened by a merchant at dawn. They stood abashed and shy and flocked around the table like bees inside a hive. But that apprehensive embarrassment, which was at the same time a reproach and coquetry, was either calculated seduction or involuntary modesty. It was perhaps only the peculiarity of women never entirely to

shed their cloak of virtue, because it gave the luxuries of vice more charm and poignancy. The plot hatched by Taillefer seemed to have miscarried. The men were at first overwhelmed by the majestic strength with which all women are endowed. A murmur of admiration echoed through the room like the sweetest music. But love cannot travel in the company of drunkenness. Instead of a tornado of passion, the guests, taken by surprise at a weak moment, abandoned themselves to the delights of a voluptuous ecstasy. Obeying the voice of poetry, which always dominated them, they happily studied the delicate nuances which distinguished the women. Awakened by the thought, the result perhaps of the carbonic acid in the champagne, of the many vices which they had brought with them, a philosopher shivered. Each of them could no doubt relate some bloody drama, and nearly all had borne infernal tortures, which had come in the wake of faithless men, betrayed promises and joys ransomed by misery. The guests at first approached them politely and soon conversations as diverse as their characters had been established. Some formed themselves into groups. To see them like that anyone would have thought that it was merely a salon with well-chosen company, where young women had come to the help of the guests, after dinner, with coffee and liqueurs, and with sugar for the embarrassed gourmands suffering the travails of a recalcitrant digestion. But soon bursts of laughter could be heard, the conversation grew louder and voices were raised. The orgy, subdued for the moment, threatened at intervals to assert itself. This alternation between silence and tumult resembled a Beethoven symphony.

The two friends found themselves seated on a soft divan near a tall, well-proportioned girl, whose superb carriage and impetuous face arrested the attention by their many vigorous contrasts. Her black hair was lasciviously curled and fell over her broad shoulders in light curls. Her majestic neck was half-enveloped in rolls of brown silk and, when the light glistened on it at intervals, revealed an attractive slenderness. Her skin, dead white in colour,

emphasised the warm and animated tones of her dress, while her eyes, armed with long lashes, sparkled audaciously. Her mouth, red, humid and half-open seemed to invite a kiss. She was a sturdy type, but obviously elastic in the matter of love. Her breasts and arms were well developed, like a figure by Carrache, but she was supple and nimble. Her vigour implied the agility of a panther, as the virile elegance of her figure promised consuming voluptuousness. She could no doubt laugh and be merry, but her eyes and smile frightened away thought. Like those ancient prophetesses dominated by a demon, she startled rather than pleased. A million expressions passed like flashes of lightning over her mobile face. Some blasé men would have probably found her ravishing, but she would have unnerved a young and inexperienced man. She seemed like a colossal statue which had fallen from a Greek temple, sublime from a distance, but from close, vulgar. However, her beauty could excite the weak, her voice charm the deaf and her glances reanimate the old. Emile could not help vaguely comparing her with a Shakespearean tragedy or a species of arabesque, in which love is a savage joy succeeded by tumultuous anger. He felt that she was a monster of a woman who could cry like an angel, laugh like a demon and improvise, in a single embrace, all the seductions of a woman, except the sighs of the melancholy and the enchanting modesty of a virgin. She wore a red velvet dress and scornfully held out to the two friends a silver tray. Obviously proud of her beauty, proud of her vices, too, perhaps, she seemed like a queen of pleasure, an image of human joy, the joy that dissipates the wealth amassed by three generations, which laughs over dead bodies, mocks at ancestors, transforms the young into old men, and, more often, the old into young men, the joy that is only allowed to giants tired of power or to those for whom war has become a pastime.

"What's your name?" asked Raphael.

"Aquilina."

"Ah! from Italy!" exclaimed Emile.

"Yes," she replied. "Just as the Popes assume another

name when they rise above others, I have taken another on being elevated above all other women."

"Have you also got a noble and terrible conspirator who loves and is prepared to die for you?" Emile inquired aroused by this spark of poetry.

"I did," she replied, "but the guillotine took him away. I always wear red in his memory."

"Oh! if she relates the story of the four young men of Rochelle, she'll never finish! . . . Silence, Aquilina! Almost all women have a lover to cry over, but not all, like you, have lost one on the scaffold. I'd rather have mine sleeping in a pit at Clamort than in a rival's bed!"

These words were said in a sweet and melodious voice by the most innocent, the prettiest and the most graceful creature who, under the wand of a fairy, seemed to have emerged from an enchanted egg. She had a delicate face, a slender waist, ravishingly modest blue eyes and pure and fresh temples. An ingenuous nymph, which has just escaped from the river, could not have been more timid or naïve than this young girl, who did not appear more than sixteen years old and ignorant of evil, love and the storms of life. Only in Paris could one have met such a woman, because her candid face hid the worst kind of depravity and the most refined vices sheltered under a brow as sweet and tender as a marguerite flower. Deceived at first by the innocence of her suave allurements, Emile and Raphael accepted the coffee which she poured out. But gradually a transformation took place and they came to recognise her for what she was. In contrast with the rugged and passionate appearance of her imposing companion, she revealed herself to be the embodiment of cold corruption and cruel voluptuousness, a sort of heartless devil who could be heedless enough to commit a crime and laugh over it. If a poet admired the beautiful Aquilina, the entire world must flee from the disturbing Euphrasia. The one was the soul of vice, the other had no soul at all.

"I want to know," said Emile to the pretty girl, "if you sometimes think of the future."

"The future?" she asked laughing. "What do you call the future? Why should I think of what doesn't exist? I never look either before or behind me. Besides, we know the future—it's the poorhouse."

"Aren't you afraid?" Raphaël asked.

"Is the poorhouse so frightening?" demanded the terrible Aquilina. "When we are neither wives nor mothers, when old age has brought wrinkles to the forehead, when we have been deprived of friends and branded as useless; what need have we of anything? All that you would see in us are cold, dry, decomposing bodies. The prettiest silks will become tatters, and the amber which used to saturate our boudoirs will smell slightly of death. But isn't it exactly the same to attend to dogs in a luxurious apartment and to sort out rags in a poorhouse? Is there so much difference between covering our white hairs under a handkerchief, sweeping the streets with a broom or the floors of the Tuileries with satin, to sit in gilded foyers or warm ourselves in a hovel before a dying fire?"

"My dear Aquilina, you are perfectly right," said Euphrasia. "Yes, laces, perfumes, silks, gold and every kind of luxury only go well with youth. Time alone will point out our follies, but happiness will absolve us. Why do you laugh?" she said smiling venomously at the two friends. "Aren't I right? I prefer to die of an abundance of pleasure than sickness. I have no great love to live long, nor any respect for the human species. If you gave me a million I'd spend it all; I wouldn't keep a centime for the next year. To live a pleasant and fashionable life, that is what I want. Besides society seems to approve of me and supplies me with endless diversions. And then why have you built poorhouses for us? Since God has given us the power to choose, it would be very foolish of me not to amuse myself."

"And the others?" Emile asked.

"The others? They can fend for themselves! I'd prefer to laugh at their sorrows than to have to cry over mine. No man can cause me the least pain now."

"What have you suffered to think like this?" asked Raphael.

"I was deserted for a legacy—I!" she said adopting a pose which accentuated all her attractions. "And, before that, I spent days and nights working to feed him! I don't want to be duped in future by a smile or a promise, and my life shall be one long round of pleasure."

"But," Raphael said, "doesn't happiness come from the soul?"

"Perhaps," Aquilina replied, "but is it nothing to see ourselves admired and flattered, to triumph over all other women, even the most virtuous? Besides we see more life in a day than a good bourgeois in ten years."

"Isn't a woman without virtue odious?" Emile said to Raphael.

"Virtue!" Euphrasia exclaimed with inimitable irony. "We leave that for the ugly and deformed women. What would they have otherwise, the poor things?"

"Very well, that's enough!" Emile said. "Let's not discuss what you don't understand."

"Don't understand!" exclaimed Euphrasia. "To dedicate a lifetime to some detestable man, to know how to bring up children who abandon you—these are the virtues you impose on women. A pretty life! I want to live a free life, to love those who please me and die young."

"Don't you fear having to pay for all that one day?"

"My life shall not be a medley of sorrows and pleasures," she replied. "It shall be divided into two parts—a happy youth and an uncertain old age, during which I shall suffer at leisure."

"She hasn't loved," said Aquilina seriously. "She hasn't walked a hundred leagues to meet a lover. She has never been called upon to stab several men to save her sovereign, her lord and her god. Love for her means only a good looking Colonel."

"Love is like the wind," replied Euphrasia. "We don't know where it blows from. Besides, if you had been loved by a beast, you'd look on virtuous men with horror."

"The law defends us in being loved by beasts," said Aquilina ironically.

"How happily unreasonable they are!" exclaimed Raphael.

"Happy?" retorted Aquilina with a pitiful smile. "You don't know what it is to be condemned to pleasure with only death in one's heart. . . ."

To look at the salon now, was to have a foretaste of Milton's Pandemonium. The blue flames of the punch lent to the faces of those who were still able to drink an infernal tint. Some foolish dances, executed with a savage energy, excited laughter and cries, which echoed through the rooms like the detonations of fireworks. The room resembled a field of battle, strewn with the dead and the dying. The atmosphere was warm with wine, pleasure and words. Drunkenness, love, delirium, forgetfulness of the world were in their hearts and on their faces. Here and there groups of faces could hardly be distinguished from the white marble, the noble masterpieces of sculpture which decorated the apartments. Although the two friends still retained a sort of deceptive lucidity in their thoughts, they found it impossible to distinguish what was real from what was not in the grotesque and fantastic scene which continually passed before their weary eyes. Gradually a sort of hazy sleepiness overtook them, and they mistook the debauch for the fantasies of a nightmare in which movement is noiseless and cries unheard.

At this moment the valet led his master aside and whispered:

"All the neighbours are at their windows, sir, complaining about the noise."

"If they're afraid of noise why don't they stuff their windows with straw?" Taillefer said.

Raphael burst out laughing so suddenly and loudly that his friend asked him why.

"You may find it difficult to understand," he replied. "But I must first tell you that when you found me on the Quai Voltaire I was about to throw myself into the Seine."

I must add, however, that, by an almost incredible chance, the most poetical ruins of the material world passed before my eyes by a symbolic epitome of human wisdom, and now the débris of every intellectual treasure, our profound thoughtlessness of men and things, is being revealed. They are strongly coloured pictures of two diametrically opposed systems of life. If you're not drunk you'll see in that a whole philosophic treatise."

"Your two systems can be summed up in a single sentence and reduced to a single thought," said Emile. "The simple and mechanical life which suffocates the intelligence by work or the empty life spent among the distractions in the abyss of the moral world. In a word, to kill any desire to live to an old age or to die young by a martyrdom of passions."

"Fool!" said Raphael. "If I were to formulate these two ideas, I would have said that man corrupts himself by the exercise of his reason and purifies himself by his ignorance. But if we lived with sages or perished with fools, the result, sooner or later, is the same, isn't it? A great thinker once summed up these two systems in two words."

"Rabelais has summed them up more briefly," replied Emile. "It is a single word—Perhaps. Yet, it is nothing more than the exclamation of Pyrrho undecided between good and bad, like Buridan's ass between two piles of oats. But let's end this eternal discussion. Why did you want to throw yourself into the Seine?"

"Ah! If you only knew my life."

"That's a frightfully hackneyed reason," replied Emile. "Didn't you know that we all pretend to suffer more than others?"

"Ah!" sighed Raphael.

"You make me sick with your Ah's! Can't you give me some more concrete reason? Have you been forced to eat your dog raw, without salt, in your attic? Are your children crying out in hunger? Have you sold your mistress' locks in order to gamble? I'm waiting! If you

want to drown yourself because of a woman, or as a protest, or from sheer weariness, I disown you. Now tell me and don't lie. And be as brief as your drunkenness will permit you. I'm as exacting as a reader, and about as sleepy as a woman reading her vespers."

"Poor fool!" said Raphaël. "When science advances to a stage when we shall be able to compile a natural history of hearts, to name them, classify them into species, subspecies, families, crustacea, fossils, saurians . . . then, my good friend, feeling will have been proved to exist, feeling as delicate as the flowers which crumble with the slightest touch . . ."

"Oh, thanks!" said Emile interrupting him with a half-laughing, half-pitying air, "but you can save me your preface."

CHAPTER II

THE HEARTLESS WOMAN

AFTER having remained silent for a moment Raphael, with a careless gesture, said:

"I don't know really if this lucidity is due to the fumes of the wine and the punch, but at this instant I can see my whole life like a picture in which the faces, the colours, the shadows, the lights and the half-tints are faithfully reproduced. That poetic flight of my imagination would not have surprised me if it were not accompanied by a sort of contempt for my past joys and sorrows. Seen from a distance my life appears to have been cramped by a strange moral phenomenon. But that long and slow sorrow, which lasted for ten years, is today nothing more than a thought, and any pleasure merely a philosophical reflection. I can judge now instead of feeling. . . ."

"You are being tiresome," said Emile.

"Possibly," replied Raphael undisturbed. "But I'm going to relate to you the first seventeen years of my life. Up to that time I had lived, like you and thousands of others, in a college whose fictitious misfortunes and real joys are the delight of our memories. It was a beautiful life. . . ."

"Come to the real drama," Emile said in a half-comic, half-plaintive air.

"When I left college," Raphael said claiming, by a gesture, his right to continue, "my father subjected me to a severe discipline. He put me in a room next to his study, made me go to bed at 9 o'clock in the evening and woke me up at 5 in the morning. He wanted me to study for the law. I used to attend school and also study with a lawyer. But the laws of time and space were so severely applied to my studies, and my father used to demand such a rigorous account . . ."

"Why should I hear all this?" interrupted Emile.

"The devil take you!" replied Raphaël. "How can you understand my feelings if I don't relate the imperceptible facts that then influenced my soul and left me for a long time in the primitive simplicity of a young man? Thus, up to the age of twentyone, I was subjected to a despotism as bad as any monkish order. But to reveal to you the sorrows of my life, I must give you a picture of my father. He was a tall man, slender and gaunt, with a pale hatchet-like face, brief in speech, as crotchety as an old woman and as meticulous as a head clerk. He crushed every happy and childish thought in my mind. If I revealed the slightest tenderness he regarded it as childish and foolish. I dreaded him more than I ever feared any tutor. I can still see him before me. Dressed in a maroon frock-coat, in which he held himself as erect as a Paschal candle, he looked like a herring enveloped in the reddish wrapper of a pamphlet. Nevertheless, I loved my father. At heart he was just. Perhaps that was because we cannot hate severity when it is justified by greatness of character, purity of morals, and is cleverly mixed with goodness. If my father never left me to myself, if, up to the age of twentyone he never gave me ten francs to spend—ten rascally francs which made me dream of so many ineffable pleasures—he tried at least to amuse me in some way. He took me to the circus, to a concert and to a ball where I had hoped to meet a mistress. A mistress! It meant freedom for me. But, being shy and timid, ignorant of the idiom of the salon, I returned home with my heart as untouched and as full of desires as before. If I ever turned away from the path prepared by my father, I knew I would only expose myself to his anger. Besides, he had threatened to send me away to the West Indies, as a cabin-boy on a ship, with the first mistake I committed. It made me shiver with fear even to think of amusing myself somewhere for an hour or two. You can imagine for yourself what the life of a man with a tender soul, a loving heart and a poetical mind must have been with the most stolid, morose and coldest man in the world.

It is like a young girl being married to a skeleton. Plans to escape vanished at the very sight of my father, my despair was calmed by sleep and sorrow dissipated by music. Music helped me a great deal. Beethoven and Mozart were often my confidants. Today I can smile at the recollection of all those prejudices that troubled my conscience at that virtuous and innocent epoch. (I thought that if I entered a restaurant I would have ruined myself. To my mind a café was an immoral place where men lost their honour and risked their fortune.) As for gambling, I had no money to gamble with. Even at the risk of putting you to sleep I want to relate one of the most terrible joys of my life, one of those joys which seem armed with claws and forces itself into one's heart like the iron on the shoulder of a galley-slave. I attended the ball given by the Duke of Navarriens, my father's cousin. But, in order that you may understand my position better, I must first tell you that I was dressed in a threadbare coat, ill-fitting shoes, a crumpled cravat and old gloves. I sat in a corner of the room so that I could enjoy my ice better, and watch the pretty women. My father caught sight of me. For some reason which I have never been able to guess, he gave me his purse and his keys to keep. Ten feet away some men were gambling. I could hear the jingle of gold. I was twenty years of age and craving to spend an entire day plunged in the pleasures of my age. It was a freedom of mind which had no analogy with the whims of courtesans or the dreams of young girls. For a year I had dreamed of having a young girl at my side, very much the nobleman, dining at Véry, and attending a show. I had estimated that it would have in all cost me fifty crowns. I slipped into an empty room where, with my eyes burning and my fingers trembling, I counted the money in my father's purse. A hundred crowns! Choked by that sum of money, the pleasures of my escapade appeared before me, dancing like the witches of Macbeth around the cauldron, but alluring, bewitching and thrilling! I became a determined rogue. Without listening to the buzzing in my ears, or the hurried pounding of my heart,

I took out two twenty-franc coins. Their numbers were effaced and Bonaparte's face seemed to grimace at me. After having replaced the purse in my pocket I returned to a gambling table holding the two coins in the humid palm of my hand. I prowled around some gamblers like a sparrow-hawk above a fowl-house. The prey of all kinds of inexpressible fears, I glanced around me. Certain of not being seen by anyone I knew, I placed a bet with the small fat man for whom I said more prayers than I would have said at sea in three storms. Then, with a villainous and Machiavellian instinct surprising for my age, I left to hang about a door, looking across the room with unseeing eyes. My heart and my eyes fluttered above the gambling table. From that evening dates the first physiological observation to which I owe that understanding of the mysteries of our double nature. Between the gamblers and myself there was a row of men, and the loud buzzing of voices prevented me from distinguishing the sound of the gold from the noise of the orchestra. But, by an inexplicable instinct, I knew exactly what was happening. Then my father suddenly passed by, and I remembered the words of the scripture: "The spirit of God passes before him!" I had won! Across the crowd of men who stood around the gamblers I rushed up to the table with the dexterity of an eel. From sorrow my feelings changed to joy. I felt like a convict who had met the king while being taken to the scaffold. But I was suspicious of the uneasy eyes that watched me. I turned pale, and drops of perspiration stood on my forehead. I was being avenged for having robbed my father. Then the small fat man said in what appeared to me an angelic voice: "All you gentlemen have won", and he paid out fifty francs to each. I lifted my head and looked triumphantly around at the gamblers. After having replaced the gold I had taken from my father's purse I betted again, and continued to win. When I found myself the proud owner of 160 francs I wrapped them up in my handkerchief so that they might not be heard to jingle on our return home, I gambled no more."

"'What were you doing near those gamblers?' my father asked me later.

"'I was watching them,' I replied trembling.

"'But,' my father said, 'there wouldn't have been anything extraordinary in your doing a little betting yourself. In the eyes of the world you are old enough to have the right to do a lot of foolish things. I would have even excused you, Raphael, if you had taken some money from my purse...'

"I remained silent. On our way home I returned the purse and the keys to my father. When he entered his room, he opened the purse, counted the money, turned towards me graciously and, punctuating each phrase with a long and significant pause, said:

"'My son, you'll soon be twentyone. You have pleased me immensely. I want to give you an allowance, not that you may learn the uses of economy, but to get to know life. From this evening I'll give you a hundred francs a month. You can spend it as you please. Here is the first quarter for this year.' His hands carressed a bag of gold as if verifying its contents.

"'I must confess that I was on the point of throwing myself at his feet and declaring that I was a thief and a brigand and, worse than that, a deceiver! But my own shame restrained me. I went up to kiss him, but he gently pushed me away.

"'You are now a man, my child,' he said. 'What I have now done is a just and simple thing... you don't have to thank me for it. If there is anything for which you have to thank me, it's for having preserved your youth from the sorrows that devour every young man in Paris. Henceforth, we shall be like two friends. In a year you'll be a doctor of law. You have, not without many annoyances, perhaps, and certain privations, acquired that solid foundation of knowledge and attachment to work which are so necessary for a man. You must try to understand me Raphael. I don't want to make you either a lawyer or a notary but a statesman who can become the glory of our poor home...'

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But that's for another day!' he added dismissing me with a mysterious gesture.

"From that day my father revealed his plans to me. I was the only son and had lost my mother ten years ago. Long before that my father, the head of a half-forgotten and historical house in Auvergne, came to Paris, it would seem, to fight the very devil himself. Being endowed with that shrewdness which makes the men of central France so superior to others, particularly when it is accompanied by sufficient energy, he soon succeeded in attaining to a position of power and wealth. The Revolution, however, soon reversed his fortune. But he married an heiress and, under the Empire, restored his family to its ancient splendour. The Restoration, however, again ruined him, though it brought considerable wealth to my mother. He had bought lands granted by the Emperor to his generals, and for nearly ten years he fought lawyers and diplomats and the Prussian and Bavarian tribunals to retain possession of them. My father threw me into the inextricable labyrinths of this vast law-suit on which our whole future depended. We were called upon to restore the income from the sale of wood between 1814 and 1817 and my mother's property was hardly sufficient to save the family's honour. Thus, on the day that my father seemed in some way to have freed me, I fell under the most odious bondage. I was forced to fight as on a battlefield, to work night and day, to interview all sorts of men, interest them in our affair, try to seduce them, their wives, their valets, their dogs and to disguise the whole horrible business under elegant forms and agreeable jokes. I understood the real meaning of the wrinkles that furrowed my father's face. For about a year then, I led, to all appearances, the life of a man of the world. But my only amusements were still pleading in the law courts, and my only conversation mere recollections. Up to that time I had been forced to live a virtuous life, because it was impossible for me to indulge in the pleasures every young man is entitled to. Besides, I felt that, by the negligence of my duty, I might ruin my father and myself.

I became my own despot and dared not permit myself either a pleasure or an expense. When we are young, when as yet that delicate flower of sentiment has not been crushed, when we are still fresh and pure of mind and permit no compromise with evil, we are acutely aware of our duties, our honour is high, and we are frank and fearless. I was like that, then. I wanted to justify the confidence my father had placed in me. I bore with him the burden of his affairs, his name and his house. I even signed away to him my own property, and with it went my hopes and my pleasures. M de Villile dug up for us an old Imperial decree on forfeitures which completely ruined us. I signed the sale of my properties and only retained a valueless island, in the middle of the Loire, where my mother had been buried. Today perhaps I would be called a fool, which is exactly what my lawyer said, but, I repeat, at twentyone, we are generous, warm and loving. The tears I saw in my father's eyes were a sufficient reward, and the memory of them has often consoled me in my misery. Ten months later my father died of a broken heart—he had loved me and ruined me! That thought seems to have killed him. In 1826, therefore, at the age of twentyone towards the end of autumn, I followed the funeral of my first friend, my father. Few young men find themselves alone with their thoughts behind a hearse, lost in Paris, with neither a future nor a fortune. The orphans, supported by public charity, can carve out a future on the battlefield, look to the Government or the Crown Prosecutor as a father and the almshouse as a refuge. But I . . . I had nothing! Three months later I received a little over a thousand francs, the net remains of my father's legacy. I had even been forced to sell my furniture. But it came as a great shock to me to learn that it had fetched so little, because from a very young age I had thought the objects which surrounded me to be of great value.

"Oh!" the lawyer told me, "all that was mere rocol!"

"A terrifying word that. It blighted all my youthful faith, and deprived me of my first illusions, which were the

dearest of all. My fortune was to be found in a sale account book, and my future in a linen bag containing thousand francs. An old valet of the family who had once looked after me, Jonathas, said to me when I left the house:

"Be careful with your money, Raphael!" He even cried, the good old man.

"These are the events, my dear Emile, which formed my destiny, influenced my soul and placed me, while still young, in the most false of all social situations," Raphael said after a pause. "Family ties, though slender, attached me to a few rich homes, but access to them was denied to me because of my pride, if scorn and indifference had not already closed their doors. Although a relative of influential people who prided themselves on their hospitality, I had neither relatives nor protectors. Continually arrested in its growth, my soul seemed to recoil on itself. Once free and artless, I had become cold and deceitful. The despotism my father exercised over me gave me confidence in myself. I had been timid and clumsy and didn't believe I could ever use the least authority over others. In spite of the inner voice which sustains men of talent in their struggles, which whispered, 'Courage!' to me, in spite of sudden revelations of strength when I was alone, in spite of the hope which inspired me when I compared the new works admired by the public with those that leaped in my mind, in spite of all this, I doubted myself like a child. I was the prey of an inordinate ambition. I believed I was destined for great things, yet found myself obscure. I had to trace out a path for myself in a world in which I found myself alone, less scared than fearing. When I was introduced by my father into the whirlwind of society, I entered it with a new heart and a fresh soul. Like all young men I secretly aspired to the most beautiful women. I met, among the younger people of my age, a set of swaggers, who held their heads high, talked nonsense, chewed the ends of their canes and fearlessly sat near the most imposing women. I must confess that the attainment of power or literary renown seemed to me less difficult to obtain than a

woman of high rank, intelligent and gracious. I seemed to be in complete disagreement with society. I was audacious, but only at heart, not outwardly, although I learned later that women were not to be importuned. I had seen many of them and admired them from afar, and was prepared to entrust my heart, body and soul to them. But they belonged to the fools to whom I had no wish to play second fiddle. How often have I not met the woman of my dreams dancing at a ball! At certain moments I felt that I could have given my whole life for a single night. Well, never having found ears into which to pour my passionate proposals, or a heart in which I could discover my own, I lived tormented by a powerless energy, and despaired of ever making myself understood. With every polite glance a woman gave me, my heart flew into a storm of palpitations. In spite of my promptitude to interpret the meaning of that glance, I had never dared to approach them. No doubt I was too naïve for the artificial society in which I found myself, a society which destroyed its mind by the constant use of hackneyed phrases that fashion dictated. I possessed the sort of soul which women were afraid to meet and, consequently, they treated me with cruel indifference. I was mistaken in wanting to find a faithful and sincere woman, to find strength and greatness in a superficial heart which was only hungry for luxury and drunk with vanity. Oh! to feel oneself born for love, to want to give a woman every happiness, and not to have found anyone, not even a courageous and noble Marceline or some old Duchess! I often wanted to kill myself in despair."

"You're pretty tragic this evening!" Emile said.

"Yes! But that's my life!" replied Raphael. "If, in spite of our friendship, you cannot listen to my elegies, if you feel that I'm only annoying you, then sleep! But don't ask me to give you my reason for wanting to commit suicide. When you judge a man you must at least know the secrets of his mind, his sorrows and his emotions."

The bitter tone in which these words were spoken

affected Emile so profoundly, that, from that moment, he gave all his attention to Raphael.

"But," continued the narrator, "the things which colour these incidents, later gave them a new aspect. What I considered at one time to be sorrow perhaps helped to form those abilities of which I came later to be so proud. Philosophical curiosity, hard work and a love of reading have always been part of my life. Don't you think they have influenced my mind and made it superior to so many others? The destitution to which I was condemned, the habit of suppressing my feelings, don't you think they gave me the power to meditate? By not losing myself in mundane irritations, which tear the most beautiful soul and reduce it to tatters, has not my sensibility become an organ perfected by a higher will than desire? Since I was disowned by women, I could judge them by all the wisdom gained by despised love. I proved to be unpleasant because I was too sincere! What do women want—hypocrisy? I am by turns a man and a child, stupid and thoughtful, unprejudiced and full of superstitions, and perhaps women have mistaken my naïveté for cynicism and the innocence of my mind for lechery. Knowledge they found annoying, and apathy a sort of feminine weakness. A fine imagination, the weakness of all poets, no doubt made me seem incapable of love, inconstant and futile. A fool when I remained silent, annoying perhaps when I attempted to speak, women avoided me. But I have accepted without a murmur the sorrow which has been inflicted on me, and I am sure that it has borne its fruit. I wanted to avenge myself on society, I wanted to gain possession of the mind of every woman, to watch them stare at me when my name was called out by a valet at the door of a salon. I thought I was a great man. From a child I had struck my forehead and, like André Chenier, said: 'There's something there!' I felt I had ideas to express, a system to establish, a science to explain. O my dear Emile, I'm now hardly twenty-six years of age, and I'm sure to die unknown, without even having been the lover of the woman I have dreamed about! Haven't we all, more

or less, mistaken our dreams for realities? I don't want a friend who is not only unimaginative but without ambition. I myself have often dreamed of being a general or an emperor. But after having reached the pinnacle, I found that I still had difficulties to face. That immense self-love that burned inside me, that sublime belief in a destiny, however, saved me. I wanted to win glory for myself and work silently for the mistress I hoped one day to have. All women could be summed up in one, and I hoped to find her in the first one I met. For her who took pity on me I not only had gratitude which rose above love, but I knew I should love her all my life. Thus, my dear Enile, I ran the risk of having to live eternally alone. Women, unhappily, are accustomed to scrutinise the faults in a talented man, but in a fool, only his good qualities. They are sympathetic towards the fool because he perpetually flatters their own faults, while the intellectual does not offer them sufficient pleasure to compensate for their imperfections. Genius suffers from a sort of *intermittent* fever, and no woman is anxious to share it. All she wants to find in her lover is some object which would satisfy her own vanity. It is this only they love in us! A poor man, proud, artistic, endowed with creative powers, hasn't he a disturbing egotism? He is perpetually in an intellectual storm, into which he draws everything, even his mistress. Could a woman who loves flattery love such a man? Would she go out of her way to find him? He hasn't the time to devote himself to those frivolities which women hold in such high esteem. I certainly would not debase my life like that. Mere love is not sufficient for a poor but great man. What he wants is self-sacrifice and devotion. The petty creatures who spend their lives surrounded by silks and satins, who are the leaders of fashion, are incapable of self-sacrifice and devotion. (The ideal woman for the man of intellect is the woman of the East, who studies his needs and is unhappy when she finds herself in disagreement with his ideals and desires.) Since I consider myself to be a genius, that's precisely the sort of woman I would have appreciated.

Finding myself at loggerheads with society in general, with an understanding that sometimes overtaxed my own mind, without parents or friends, alone in the middle of this most frightful desert they call the world, the decision I made was natural enough, though foolish. They gave me the necessary courage. It was like taking a bet with myself, in which I was both the gambler and the stake. This was my decision. Since my thousand francs would be sufficient to keep me alive for three years, I resolved to devote that time to a book which would attract the attention of the public and bring me either a fortune or a name. I was delighted to think that I was going to live on only bread and milk, like an ascetic, plunged in a world of books and thought, inaccessible, in the middle of tumultuous Paris, in a silent and studious room where, like the chrysalis, I could build myself a tomb only to be reborn more glorious and brilliant. I was prepared to risk death in order to live. Reducing life to its barest needs, its strictest necessities, I discovered that I could live on 365 francs a year. That meagre sum was more than sufficient."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Emile.

"I lived like that for nearly three years," Raphael replied with pride. "Let's calculate! Three sous for bread, two sous for milk and three sous to the butcher to prevent me from dying of hunger and to preserve my mind in a clear and lucid state. I have been able to make some marvellous discoveries on the effects produced by diet on the imagination. My lodging cost me three sous a day, I used about three sous of oil every night and paid my laundress only two sous a day. Coal cost me approximately two sous a day. I had some clothes, linen and shoes which would last me for three years, and, besides, I only dressed when I visited the courts or the libraries. Added together these expenses only total eighteen sous, leaving me a balance of two sous for unforeseen expenses. I do not recall, during that long period to have ever crossed the Bridge of Arts or to have bought even a soft drink. Oh! I bore my poverty proudly! A man who has a glorious future can endure a

life of miserable poverty because he has the courage of an innocent man who has been unjustly condemned. Like Aquilina, I had no fear of the poorhouse. I kept the best of health, and only cut my hair when, an angel of love or But I won't anticipate my story. I want you to know that, instead of a mistress, I lived with a great ambition, a dream, a deception which more or less came to believe myself. Today, I can afford to laugh at myself. Society, the world, our customs, our morals, seen from afar, have revealed to me the danger of my innocent belief and the superfluity of my fervent endeavours. How easy life is for the mere fortune hunter! The trouble with superior men is that they fritter away their youth to make themselves worthy of favour. The adventurers, on the other hand, spend them entrapping fools and insinuating themselves into the confidence of simpletons. He must necessarily win in the end. I certainly had no wish to amplify the common ties of virtue, the hymn of hymns sung by every unknown genius. What I wanted to do was to deduce logically the reason why mediocre men were so successful. Perhaps knowledge itself is a sufficient reward for the intellectual, and it would be a crime for him to demand anything more than the simple and pure joys offered to children. I remember often to have sat before my window, happily soaking my bread in milk, and gazing at a scene of brown, red, grey and slate roofs covered with yellow or green moss. If at first I found this view monotonous, singular beauties were soon revealed to me. The last rays of the sun, shining on that ocean of vague immobility, lent it a peculiar animation and its undulations were feebly reflected in the streets below. Then, sometimes, rare faces appeared in the middle of that gloomy desert. Amongst the flowers of a window-top garden I suddenly discovered the hooked profile of an old woman watering her nasturtiums, or some young girl doing her toilet, of whom I was only able to see the beautiful forehead, and the long tresses held in the air by a pretty white arm. In the water spouts I used to admire the ephemeral plants that sprung up, only to be washed away

by the first storm! I used to study the moss, how its colour was revived by the rain after it had been changed into a velvety brown by the sun. The poetic and fugitive effects of the day, the sudden glimmers of the sun, the silent magic of the night and the mysteries of the dawn, and all the other accidents of nature became familiar to me and diverted me. I came to love my imprisonment, because it was voluntary. Those savannahs of Paris, formed by the roofs, were as level as a plain, but covered a whole world of people. They reached the very depths of my soul and harmonised themselves with my thoughts. It is fatiguing sometimes to suddenly discover the world when we descend from the celestial heights of scientific meditation.

"When I had fully decided to follow my new plan of life, I searched for lodgings in the most deserted part of Paris. One evening, while returning from the Estrapade, I happened to pass down Cordiers Road. At the corner of Clugny Road, I saw a small girl, about fourteen years of age, playing at battledore and shuttlecock with one of her friends. That was in the month of September. In front of almost every door women were to be seen seated chatting to each other, as in a provincial town on a feast day. I noticed the young girl first. Her face had an admirable expression and her body set as if ready for a painter. It was a ravishing scene. I wanted to find out the reason for such happiness in the middle of Paris. I noticed that the street was unfrequented and was a cul-de-sac. I suddenly recalled that Jean-Jacques Rousseau had lived there and soon discovered the Saint-Quentin hotel. I found it in a dilapidated state and, hoping to find cheap lodgings, wanted to go in. But when I entered the low room, I was immediately struck by its cleanliness and the copper candlestands methodically arranged under each arch. The whole room was arranged in a conventional manner, like a picture, with its utensils and furniture. The mistress of the hotel, a woman of about forty years, whose every feature expressed sorrow and whose eyes seemed dulled with tears, got up and approached me. I humbly gave her my rent. Without revealing the least

astonishment, she searched for a key among the others and conducted me to a room in the garret, from where one could see all the roofs and courtyards of the neighbouring houses, with long strings heavy with washing hanging from the windows. Nothing more horrible than this garret with its stained and dirty walls could be conceived. The roof was low and through some broken tiles could be seen the sky. There was just sufficient space for a bed, a table and some chairs, and, in one corner, I was able to place my piano. Not having enough money to furnish it, the poor woman had never been able to rent it. She welcomed me, therefore, and the next day I was installed in the room. I lived in this aerial sepulchre for nearly three years, working day and night without intermission, with so much pleasure, that study seemed to me to be the most beautiful exercise and the happiest solution to human life. There is something fine about the calm and silence necessary for the savant, they are intoxicating like love. The exercise of the mind, the quest after ideas and the tranquil contemplation of science produces the most ineffable delights. It is impossible to explain the mysteries of the mind except by material comparisons. The pleasure of swimming in a translucent lake, alone, surrounded by rocks, trees and flowers and caressed by a lukewarm breeze, is the only thing that would give the ignorant a feeble picture of the happiness I enjoyed, when my soul seemed to bathe in the rays of I do not know what light, when I listened to the terrible and confused voices of inspiration and when, from an unknown source, ideas streamed through my throbbing mind. To watch an idea dawning on the field of human abstraction, like the sun in the morning, to watch it grow like a child, to notice it reach puberty, and gradually nourish itself, is something above any other earthly joy ; it is in fact a divine pleasure. And everything around me became part of that pleasure. The mean table on which I wrote, and the brown sheepskin which covered it, and my piano, my cot, my sofa-chair, the singularities of my wallpaper and my furniture—the accomplices of my future—how often have I not communicated my

very soul to them! While staring at them I have sometimes been struck by new ideas with which to build up my system or found words in which to express them. And by contemplating the objects which surrounded me I discovered their physiognomy and their character. Often they spoke to me, coloured or turned pale, were sad or gay, but always surprising me by some new effect or other. These pretty accidents of a solitary life, which escape so many in their pre-occupations, are the consolation of prisoners. And then wasn't I captivated by an idea, imprisoned by a system, but sustained by the hope of a glorious future? With each difficulty that I overcame, I got nearer to kissing the hands of the beautiful, rich and elegant woman who would one day caress my hair and say tenderly to me: 'You have suffered enough, my poor angel!'

"I had undertaken two great works. One was a comedy which I hoped would bring me renown and a fortune, and entrance into that world where I would be able to exercise the royal rights of the man of genius. You have all discovered in that masterpiece the silliness of the child, the immaturity of the young man who has just left college. Your criticisms have cut the wings of my fertile illusions and they have since not grown. I alone, my dear Emile, have been able to cure the profound wound inflicted on my heart! I alone will admire my Theory of the Will, that long work to write which I had studied Oriental languages, anatomy and physiology, and to which I had devoted the greater part of my time. That work, if I'm not deceived, will complete the works of Mesmer, Tavater, de Gall, de Bichat, because it will open a new path in the study of human science. There ends my beautiful life, that sacrifice of so many days, the only reward for which seems to be in the work itself. Since the age of reason to the day I completed my Theory, I observed, studied, wrote and read without intermission. . . . My life, in fact, was one long task. An effeminate lover of Oriental idleness, I refused to taste the pleasures of Paris; a gourmand, I remained sober; a lover of travel, I constantly remained

seated with a pen in my hand ; talkative, I went to listen in silence to the professors at the library and the museum ; I have slept on my truckle-bed like a priest of the Saint-Benoît Order. Woman was my only chimera, a chimera that I always cherished, but which constantly escaped me ! My life has thus been a perpetual illusion and a cruel antithesis. Sometimes my natural desires awoke like a long-smothered fire. By a sort of mirage or calenture, I, who was bereft of all the women I desired, deprived of everything, and living in a garret, I suddenly used to find myself surrounded by ravishing mistresses ! I would be gnawed by vices, plunged in debauchery, desiring everything, getting everything and finally drunk on an empty stomach like St. Anthony in his temptation. Fortunately, sleep eventually dissipated these devouring visions. The next day science would smilingly beckon to me and I would go faithfully to her. Women would probably say that it is only the virtuous who are the prey to these whirlwinds of folly, desire and passion, which arise in us in spite of ourselves. But such dreams, I must say, are not without their charm.

"For the first six months of my seclusion I led the poor and solitary life I have just described for you. In the morning, without being seen, I went to buy my provisions for the day. I tidied my own room, I was both master and servant, but I was incredibly proud of my life. But after that, after my hostess and her daughter had spied on my morals and my habits, examined my person and understood my misery, perhaps because they themselves were so miserable, inevitable ties were established between them and myself. Pauline, that charming girl whose naïve and secret graces had in some way led me there, rendered me several services that I found impossible to refuse. All unfortunate people are sisters who speak the same language and have the same generosity, the generosity of those who, possessing nothing, are prodigal with their time and their person. Insensibly Pauline came to attend to almost all my wants and her mother showed no opposition. In fact the mother

herself used to mend my linen and, when I discovered her so charitably occupied, she used to blush. Having become, in spite of myself, their dependant, I accepted their services. To understand this strange relation you must bear in mind the passion for work and the instinctive repugnance for the details of everyday life that the intellectual possesses. Could I resist when Pauline silently brought my frugal meal into my room, when she knew that for seven or eight hours I had eaten nothing? With the graces of a woman and the ingenuity of a child she would sign to me not to take any notice of her. She seemed like Ariel gliding into my room, like a sylph to provide me with my needs. One evening she told me her story with a touching naïveté. Her father had been a Major in the Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard. At the crossing of the Beresina, he was made a prisoner by the Cossacks. Later, when Napoleon wanted to have him exchanged, the Russian authorities looked for him in vain in Siberia. He had escaped, with some other prisoners, to India. Since then, Madame Gaudin, my hostess, had obtained no news of her husband. The disasters of 1811 and 1815 came. Alone, without resources or help, she decided to run a hotel in order to be able to bring up her daughter. But she always hoped to see her husband again. Her worst sorrow was not to be able to give Pauline an education, her Pauline, the goddaughter of Princess Borghese, who would never enjoy the beautiful future predicted by her Imperial protectress. When Madame Gaudin confided to me the bitter sorrow that was eating into her heart, she said, in a distressing voice: 'I would give up the scrap of paper that made Gaudin a Baron of the Empire, and the claim that we have to the Wistchnau endowment, to have Pauline educated at Saint-Denis!' Suddenly an idea struck me. Why shouldn't I offer to finish Pauline's education in return for the services they had showered on me? The ingenuous way in which the proposal was accepted by the two women was equal to the naïveté which dictated it. I thus came to enjoy some hours of recreation. The child had the happiest disposition, and

she learnt so easily that she soon became more proficient than I on the piano. Accustomed to discussing intellectual things with me, her heart slowly unfolded a thousand and one beautiful things, like a flower opening before the sun. She would listen attentively and with pleasure, her dark velvety eyes, which seemed to smile, resting on me. She repeated her lessons in a sweet and caressing voice, and revealed a childish delight when I was pleased with her. Her mother, who every day became more uneasy about having to preserve a young girl who was slowly developing into womanhood, was pleased when she saw her lock herself up in a room in order to study. My piano being the only one she could use, she made use of it to practise on when I was absent. Sometimes when I returned, I would find her there in the most modest dress imaginable. But with the least movement, her supple waist and the subtle charms of her body would be revealed under the coarse material. Like the heroine of *Peau-d'Ane*, her tattered shoes covered dainty feet. But all her prettiness, all the luxury of her beauty was lost to me. I had decided to treat Pauline as my sister, because the thought of betraying the confidence of her mother horrified me. I would admire the charming girl as I would a picture, or the portrait of a dead mistress. But above all, she was my child, my statue, which I wanted to mould into a living and colourful virgin. I was often very severe with her, but the more despotic I was the sweeter and more submissive she became. If my caution and my continence were dictated by noble sentiments, I also felt as if I were her steward. I have always looked upon deceiving a woman or going bankrupt as the same thing. To love a young girl, or to be loved by her, constitutes a contract, the conditions of which must be fully carried out. We can easily abandon the woman who sells herself to us, because she ignores the extent of her sacrifice. It would have been sheer folly then for me to have married Pauline. Wouldn't that have been like handing over a sweet and virgin soul to the most frightful miseries? My poverty was always present, and placed its iron hand between her and myself. I could

not conceive of love in poverty. Perhaps it is only due to that human malady which we call civilisation. But a woman, even were she as lovely as Helen, would not attract me. What I want is love enfolded in silk and surrounded by all the marvels of luxury!... shining eyes whose piercing looks are more destructive than cannon-fire! Can you imagine the delight of entering a perfumed room on a winter night, covered in snow, to meet a beautiful woman, who also seems to be covered in snow, because how else could one describe the voluptuous muslins which enfold her? Happiness for me must be apprehensive and security audacious. I want to meet that dazzling mysterious woman of my dreams, dressed in lace, shining with diamonds, and placed so high and so imposing that none dare swear love to her. One look from her is enough to make me sacrifice the whole world! I know it is foolish of me to fall in love with a few yards of velvet or fine cambric, a stage-coach or a title. I have reasoned with myself and laughed at it all, but it has been in vain. An aristocratic woman, with her gracious smile and distinction, enchants me. By not doing what other women do, by not walking or living like them, by enveloping herself in the mantle which they don't possess, my mistress becomes all the more attractive to me. The further she removes herself from the world even in the matter of love, the more beautiful she becomes in my eyes. In France, happily we've been without a Queen for twenty years, because I would have fallen in love with her! In the presence of my romantic fantasies who was Pauline? Could she give me a love which could put in play and mortify all my human faculties? We don't die for the poor women who give themselves to us! I have never been able to destroy those sentiments or those poetic dreams. I was born to love the impossible, and chance has placed it beyond my reach. How often have I encased Pauline's feet in satin, imprisoned her slim young waist in a gauze dress, thrown a light scarf over her bosom and conducted her to an elegant carriage! I adored her like that. I gave her a pride that she never possessed, I stripped her of all her

virtues, of her naïve graces, of her charming naturalness, her ingenuous smile, plunged her into the styx of our vices, made her heart invulnerable, varnished her with our crimes and made her the fantastic doll of our salons, the woman who is reborn in the evening with the dawn of the candles. Pauline was too sentimental and fresh. I wanted to season her. Now I can only remember her as we recall the scenes of our childhood. While in a dreamy mood, I still sometimes picture her seated near my table, sewing busily, peaceful and silent, her beautiful dark hair lit up by light silvery reflections from the sun which poured through the window, or hear her young laugh or her rich voice singing the gracious ballads that she used to compose so effortlessly. When she sang she seemed to become exalted, and her face had a striking resemblance to that noble head by which Carlo Dolci wanted to represent Italy. But let's leave the poor child to her destiny. She deserved happiness, and the least I could have done was to abstain from dragging her into my hell.

"Until last winter my life was the tranquil and studious one I have feebly attempted to describe. About the first week of December, 1829, I met Rastignac, who, in spite of the miserable state of my clothes, gave me his arm and inquired after my fortune with an interest that was truly fraternal. Ensnared by his manner, I briefly described to him my life and my hopes. He laughed and treated me as if I were both a genius and a fool. His Gascon voice, his experience of the world and his tactfulness irresistibly attracted me. In the same breath he spoke about dying in the poor-house, unknown, like a simpleton, of following my funeral, and about charlatanism. With that friendly animation that makes him so attractive he proved to me that all men of genius were charlatans. He declared that I, at least, had some sense, and a good reason for wanting to die if I continued to live on Cordiers Road.

"'You . . . you work don't you?' he said. 'Well, you'll come to nothing. And I . . . I'm as lazy as a lobster, aren't I? Well, I'll get everything I want. That's because I move

in society, push myself forward, and they make room for me. I boast and they believe me, I pile up debts and they pay them! Idleness, my dear friend, is a political system. The life of a man who wants to squander away his fortune is a speculation. He invests his capital in friends, in pleasures, in protectors and acquaintances. What does a merchant do with his million? For twenty years he does not sleep, drink or amuse himself. He distributes his million all over Europe, he tires himself out and gives himself up to all the demons man has invented. When he goes into liquidation, he is often left without a sou, a name or a friend. The idler, on the other hand, lives fully. And if, by bad luck, he loses his money, he has the chance of being made Receiver General, of marrying well or becoming an Ambassador. Knowing the springs of the world he manoeuvres them to his profit. That's perfectly logical or I'm a fool. You've finished your work, now, haven't you? You're a talented young man! But it is very necessary now to make sure of your own success. You'll have to make alliances with coteries and overcome long-winded preachers. But I must share some of your glory. . . I'll be the jeweller who'll show you the diamonds of your crown. For a start, be here tomorrow evening. I'll introduce you into a house to which all Paris goes . . . our Paris, the Paris of beauty, wealth and fame. When these people have accepted a book, it becomes fashionable, and if it happens to be really good then they've recognised genius without knowing it. Tomorrow evening then you'll meet the beautiful Feodora. . .'

" 'But I've never heard of . . .'

" 'You're a Bantu,' Rastignac replied laughing. 'You don't know Feodora! She's the woman to marry . . . gets nearly 21,000 pounds . . . either she wants nobody or nobody wants her! A real feminine problem, a half-Russian Parisian or a half-Parisian Russian! She's the most beautiful woman in Paris and the most gracious! You're not even a Bantu . . . you're something between an animal and a Bantu . . . Adieu, till tomorrow.'

"He swung around and disappeared, without even waiting for a reply. How can one explain the fascination of a name? Feodora followed me about like a bad thought, with which one tries to compromise. A voice constantly whispered to me: 'You'll be at Feodora's tomorrow!' But I fought the voice and tried to crush it with all the reason at my disposal. But the name and the woman, weren't they the symbols of all my desires, the theme of my life? The name awakened all the artificiality in the world, and the woman appeared to me with all the problems of passion which infatuated me. It was perhaps neither the woman nor the name, but all the vices in my soul which awoke to tempt me again. Countess Feodora, rich and without a lover, immune to every Parisian seduction . . . wasn't she the incarnation of all my hopes and my visions? I could not sleep that night . . . I became her lover and, in a few hours, enjoyed an entire lifetime, and savoured its fertile and beautiful delights. The next day, incapable of enduring the torment of having to wait till the evening, I started reading a novel, making it impossible to think of or count the time. While I read, the name Feodora echoed through my mind like a sound that one hears from afar. Fortunately I still possessed a presentable black suit and white waistcoat. Of all my fortune there still remained thirty francs, which I had sewn in my clothes and hidden in my drawers, so as to place, between a hundred-sou coin and the realisation of my fantasies, the thorny barrier of a search and a hazardous circumnavigation of my room. While I was dressing I pursued my fortune across an ocean of paper. You can imagine how rich I was when my gloves could hold sufficient money for bread for a month! We never lack money to satisfy our whims, we only haggle over the prices of useful and necessary things. How many men there are who wear a hundred-cent coat, a diamond in the knob of their canes, and dine for twentyone sous! It seems to me that we can never pay dearly enough for our vainest pleasures. When Rastignac saw me, he smiled at my metamorphosis and joked about it. But as we wended our way to the Countess's,

he charitably advised me on the way I should conduct myself towards her. He told me that she was avaricious, vain and defiant, but avaricious with ostentation, vain with simplicity and defiant with goodwill.

"'I'm only thinking of your future,' he told me. 'Be careful what you tell her, she has a cruel memory and a shrewdness that could be the despair of a diplomat. She belongs to the society of Madame de Serizy and constantly visits Madame Nucingen and Madame Restaud. In France her reputation is intact. The Countess of Carigliano, the most stiff-necked of the Bonapartist coterie, often spends a season with her. Many young coxcombs, the sons of the Peers of France have offered her a name in exchange for a fortune, but she has politely turned them all down. Perhaps she only likes Counts? You're a Count, aren't you? Go ahead then if you like her!'

"This joke only made me feel that Rastignac wanted to poke fun at me and excite my curiosity. The result was, when we reached the decorated peristyle of Feodor's house, my imprisoned passion was in a paroxysm of excitement. Climbing the long carpeted steps, with its strange English elegance, my heart began to beat fast. My face began to turn red and belie my origin and my pride. I felt foolishly bourgeois. But you must remember that I had just left a garret after three years of poverty. I still had not realised how much above the mere trumperies of life those acquired treasures, that immense intellectual capital, stood. I saw a woman of about twenty-eight years, dressed in white with a fan in her hand and surrounded by a crowd of men. When she saw Rastignac, she rose, walked towards us, smiled gracefully, and spoke in a melodious voice. Rastignac had introduced me as a man of talent, and his cunning and Gascon emphasis, obtained for me a flattering welcome. I was the object of much attention, which, I must confess, confused me, but fortunately, Rastignac had also told them of my modesty. I met some savants, some men of letters, some old Ministers and some Peers of France. The conversation, a little after my arrival, resumed its normal course, and I,

feeling that I had a reputation to maintain, joined in. I made use of some rather incisive words, whether intelligent or not I cannot tell, but they created quite a sensation. For the thousandth time in his life Rastignac had proved himself to be a true prophet. When he found that I had had enough of society, he took me by the arm and we walked around the rooms.

"Don't look as if you're enamoured of the princess," he said to me, 'the object of your visit may become obvious'.

"The house was furnished in exquisite taste. Each room, as in some opulent English homes, had its own distinct character, and the silk hangings, the furniture, and the smallest detail proved my first impression. In a boudoir, the door of which was hidden by tapestry curtains, the borders of the curtains, the clock and the designs on the carpet were gothic. The ceiling, with its brown sculptured joists, had some graceful and original compartments, while the wainscoting had been artistically worked. But what surprised me was a small room, where some unknown artist had exhausted our modern décor, it was so fresh, suave and sober. It resembled a tender German ballad. The next room I entered revived the century of Louis XIV, which produced a bizarre but agreeable contrast.

"You'll be able to live comfortably!" Rastignac said with an ironical smile. "Don't you find the room fascinating?" he added sitting down.

"But suddenly he rose, took my hand led me into the bedroom, where, under a canopy of muslin and white silk, he showed me a voluptuous bed.

"Isn't there," he said in a low voice, 'something immodest and insolent in permitting us to contemplate that throne of love? And to allow nobody to share it! If I were free, I'd make her submissive and come crying to my door...'

"Are you sure she's so virtuous?"

"The most audacious men and even the most learned have vowed to sleep with her, but they are still merely her devoted friends. Isn't she an enigma?"

"These words immediately excited my jealousy and I began to fear Feodora's past. But, in spite of that, I felt overjoyed, and hurriedly returned to the gothic boudoir, where I met the Countess. She stopped me with a smile, made me sit down next to her and questioned me on my work. She seemed extremely interested, particularly when I began to joke about my system and not use stilted professorial language. She seemed highly amused when I told her that the human will was a material force like steam, that almost nothing can resist it in the moral world, and that, through it, man can modify anything, even the absolute laws of humanity. Feodora's objections revealed a fine intellect. But I allowed her to talk on and then destroyed all her arguments by a single word, by drawing her attention to a daily fact in life, sleep, which was full of insoluble problems for the savant. I excited her curiosity and she remained silent for an instant, when I told her that our ideas were based on complete organised beings who lived in an invisible world which influenced our destinies and, as proof, I quoted Descartes, Diderot and Napoleon. I apparently amused her and, before she left, she invited me to visit her again. Either Feodora saw in me some future celebrity who would augment her ménagerie of savants or I mistook her polite invitation to mean something more... But in any case I must have pleased her. I conjured up all my physiological knowledge and my earlier studies to make a minute study of her behaviour throughout the evening. Hidden in the embrasure of a window I pried into her mind by studying the way she sat down, chatted, called a man, questioned him and leaned against a door to listen. Her bearing and movements were so fine, the undulations of her dress so gracious and she so strongly excited desire that I became incredulous of her virtue. If today Feodora disowned love she must at one time have been extremely passionate, because her every movement revealed an elaborate voluptuousness. There was coquetry in the way she leaned against the wainscoting, as if she were about to fall, but yet again she was ready to run away with the least

look that intimidated her. With her arms loosely crossed she seemed to breathe out her words, the delicacy of which were enhanced by the expression in her eyes. Her bust was certainly the most attractive I had seen. A rival would have perhaps attributed the thickness of her eyebrows, which appeared to meet, to hardness, and criticised the almost imperceptible down which covered her face. I found passion written everywhere on her. It was written in her eyes, her beautiful shoulders, which were worthy of the Venus de Milo, her features and on her lips. She was more than a woman, she was a novel. But all those feminine charms were tempered by a constant reserve and an extraordinary coldness, that were in vivid contrast with her entire person. Observation as acute as mine was necessary to discover her inherent voluptuousness. To explain myself more clearly, Feodora was a dual personality. Finally, or my science was imperfect, and I still had many secrets to discover, the Countess possessed a beautiful soul, whose feelings communicated themselves to her face and lent it that charm which subjugated and fascinated us. I felt ravished, completely seduced by her, and everything that was noble, vicious, good or bad in my heart was gratified. Finding myself so moved and exalted, I felt I understood what led those artists and diplomats there; they no doubt wanted to share that delicious emotion which stirred every fibre in my body, whipped blood into my smallest vein, and sent my brain seething. A woman can be a coquette even though she may not fall in love.

"I walked from Faubourg Saint-Honoré, where Feodora lived. It's a pretty good distance from Cordiers Road, but I hardly noticed it even though it was cold. To undertake the conquest of Feodora in winter, when I hadn't thirty francs and the distance which separated us was so great! It is only a poor young man who realises how costly love can be in carriages, gloves, linen etc. If love remain platonic too long it becomes ruinous. And how could I, who was so pale and emaciated, compete with rich, spruce and handsome young men?

• “‘Bah! Feodora or death!...’ I exclaimed. ‘Feodora means fortune!’

“The beautiful gothic boudoir and the Louis XIV room passed before my eyes, and I saw the Countess again in her white dress and her seductive bust. When I reached my cold, naked and dirty garret, my mind was still filled with thoughts of her and the luxury she lived in. The contrast put grave thoughts into my mind... that is how crimes are born. My whole body shuddered with anger and I cursed my honest and decent misery and the garret in which I had achieved so much. I demanded a reason for my unhappy state from God, the Devil, my father, society and the entire universe. I lay down famished, muttering ridiculous imprecations, but fully resolved to seduce Feodora. I will refer only briefly to my first visits to Feodora’s. I flattered her in every way I could, I tried to win her mind, and, to make sure of her love for me, gave her a thousand better reasons why she should love herself. I have never been indifferent towards her. Slowly my passion grew and if, at first, my motives were not very laudable, I soon became distraught with love. I don’t know what we conceive love to be, both in poetry and conversation, but the feeling which suddenly developed in me I have not found portrayed either in the studied rhetoric of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in the best periods of French literature, or the pictures of Italy. The sight of Bienne lake, some of Rossini’s themes, and Murillo’s Madonna alone have transported me into the divine regions of my first love. Nothing in human language, no thought helped by colours, words or sounds, expressed the perfection of the feeling in my soul! Yes! art is all humbug! Love passes through an infinite number of changes before it finally becomes a part of our life. The secret of that imperceptible infusion escapes the artist. And for a cold man true passion expresses itself in cries and tedious sighs. Love has a naïve source... it leaves its bed of water-cresses and flowers, and as it flows, it changes its aspect with every wave, until it finally throws itself into an incommensurable ocean, where immature minds find only

monotony but where great souls engulf themselves in perpetual contemplation. How can I dare to describe those transitory shades of feeling, those nothings which are so valuable, those words whose meanings exhaust all the treasures of language and those glances more pregnant than the richest poems? At each of the mystic stages by which we fall insensibly in love with a woman an abyss opens to swallow up all the poem written. How can we explain the mysterious agitations of the soul when we lack words to portray the visible mysteries of beauty? How many hours have I not spent in ineffable contemplation of her! Was I happy? About what? I don't know. At that moment her face would be resplendent with light, and the imperceptible down which covered her delicate skin would softly outline the contours with the grace that we admire in the distant lines of the horizon when they lose themselves in the sun. It seemed that her radiant face was the very source of light itself. Then a shadow would pass over it and vary the expressions and change the shades. Often a thought would depict itself on her marble-like forehead, her eyelids would flicker and her features become agitated by a smile. I don't know what reflections from her hair touched her fresh temples, but with each variation it almost seemed as if she had spoken. Each nuance of her beauty brought new delight to my eyes and revealed unknown charms. I read emotion and hope in every change of her face. The sound of her voice made me delirious. I'm sure I could have held a live coal in the hollow of my hand when she passed her delicate fingers through my hair. It was no longer mere admiration or desire, but a fatal charm. Often, when I had returned to my garret, I would see Feodora indistinctly and vaguely share her life. If she suffered, I would suffer too. How many times haven't I seen her in the middle of the night evoked by the force of my own ecstasy! As sudden as a flash of light she would hurl my pen aside, drive science and study away, and force me to admire her. Then, suddenly, I would awake crying. One day, after having promised to see a show with me,

she capriciously refused to go, and asked me to leave her alone. Desperate at her refusal, which cost me a day's work and, shall I say, my last crown, I went to the show myself. But I had hardly sat down when an electric shock seemed to pass through me. A voice said: 'She's there!' I returned and found the Countess alone, hidden away in the shadows of her room. It was incredible how easily I was able to find her, my soul seemed to fly out towards her as an insect to a flower. But what made me return? The cause is to be found in our inner nature which, perhaps, would surprise superficial minds, but which in reality is as simple as the every-day phenomena we see around us. I was not astonished but offended. In my passion I met the living proofs of the system I had established. The alliance between the savant and love, of veritable idolatry and science, was somewhat bizarre. When Feodora saw me she became serious and slightly embarrassed. Although we had never spoken of love, although I had not yet revealed my secret to her, there was a sort of understanding between us. She would confide her plans to me and often she would ask me, with uneasy friendliness, if I would see her the next day. When she felt she had said something intelligent she would look at me as if she wanted to please me exclusively; if I sulked she would become caressing, and if she made a mistake I had some sort of right to correct her; if I committed a fault I would have to supplicate her for a long time before she forgave me. But we rather liked those petty quarrels. She was so charming and coquettish and I was more than happy! But when I entered her room our former intimacy seemed to have suddenly stopped, and we faced each other like two strangers. The Countess was frigid and I feared a mishap.

"You must come with me," I told her.

"The weather had suddenly changed. When we went out it was snowing. Our carriage could not go up to the door of the theatre and, when the commissionaire saw Feodora would have to walk, he held an umbrella above our heads. When we reached the top of the steps he held out his hand for a tip. I had no money on me. It was a terrible

blow to my vanity to have to refuse him and I felt the man's sorrow when the valet pushed him aside. When we returned home, Feodora, who was preoccupied or pretended to be preoccupied, answered my question in monosyllables. I remained silent. It was a horrible moment. We sat before the fireplace and, when the valet had retired, the Countess turned towards me, with indescribable solemnity, and said:

"Ever since I returned to France, my fortune has tempted many young men. I have received declarations of love which should have more than satisfied my pride. I have met young men whose affection for me has been so sincere and profound, that they would have married me even if I were the poor woman I once was. I must also tell you that I have not only been offered riches but titles, and nobody has been so foolish as to make the offer again. If my affection for you were light I wouldn't give you a warning in which there is more friendship than pride. I am familiar with the scenes of *d'Arsinoë*, *d'Araminte* and I therefore know the replies I might expect to hear in similar circumstances. But I hope today I won't be misjudged by a superior young man by revealing, as it were, my very soul'.

"She spoke as calmly as an advocate or a notary explaining the grounds of a case or the articles of a contract to his clients. The clear and seductive tone of her voice contained not the least emotion, and her face and her bearing, always noble and fine, was cold and curt like a diplomat. She had no doubt thought out her words and prepared the scene beforehand. Oh! my dear friend, when women take pleasure in wounding one's heart, they are adorable! One day they will reward us for what we suffer, as God does, they say. They will reward us a hundredfold, and then isn't their wickedness itself full of love? But who can endure being tortured by a cold, indifferent woman? Isn't that corporal punishment? At that moment, Feodora, without knowing it, was trampling on all my hopes, breaking my life and destroying my future with the indifference and innocent cruelty of a child, who, out of curiosity, tears out the wings of a butterfly.

"'Late,' Feodora added, 'I hope you will accept that sincere affection which I offer to all my friends. Towards them you will always find me good and devoted. I would give my very life for them. . . But I must stop. You are the only man to whom I have said'.

"At first words failed me. I could hardly suppress the strong feelings which arose in my heart. But gradually I regained mastery over myself.

"'If I told you I loved you,' I said smiling, 'you will probably dismiss me, and if I were indifferent, you will certainly punish me in some way. Priests, magistrates and women never strip themselves entirely. To have warned me in such a sisterly fashion you must have been afraid of losing me, and that thought satisfies my pride. But let's leave egotism alone. You are perhaps the only woman with whom I can discuss, philosophically, a decision so contrary to human nature. You are really quite an enigma. Well, let's search together—and in good faith—for the reason of that psychological anomaly. Do you suffer, like many proud women who admire their own perfections, from a subtle egotism which makes you regard with horror the thought of belonging to a man? Then you'll be a thousand times more beautiful to me! Did you suffer the first time you fell in love? Perhaps you're afraid that maternity would ravage your elegant waist? Isn't that one of your best reasons for refusing to fall in love? Or do you suffer from deformity, that forces you to be virtuous in spite of yourself? I hope you're not offended by what I say. I am merely discussing, studying the question. . . . I'm a thousand leagues from love. If nature can make people blind from birth, she can very well create women ugly, dumb and blind to all love. Really, you're a precious subject for medical study! But you are right in distrusting men; many of them are perfectly odious, and you must scorn them because there isn't a living man worthy of you!'

"I will not repeat to you all the sarcasms I uttered laughingly. But the most trenchant words, the sharpest irony did not affect her in the least. . . . it brought not the

slightest movement or gesture of resentment. She listened to me with that habitual smile on her lips, the smile that she wore like a garb, always the same for her friends, her acquaintances and strangers.

"'Aren't I tolerant to allow you to talk to me like that?' she said when I was silent. 'Many women would probably close their doors on you for being so impertinent.'

"'You can, if you want to, and give me no reason for it.'

"When I said that I was ready to kill her if she dismissed me."

"'You're a fool,' she said laughing.

"'Have you ever thought,' I said, 'what effect violent love has? A man in despair has often killed his mistress'.

"'It's better to be dead than unhappy,' she replied coldly. 'Men who are so passionate are capable of abandoning their wives to poverty after having dissipated their fortune.'

"Her logic dumfounded me. I clearly saw an abyss between her and myself. We would never be able to understand each other.

"'Adieu,' I said coldly to her.

"'Adieu,' she replied inclining her head with friendliness. 'Till tomorrow.'

"I looked at her for a moment, my heart full of all the love that I was renouncing. She was standing and gave me that banal smile of hers, the detestable smile of a marble statue trying to be loving. Can you conceive, my dear friend, how sad I was as I returned home in the snow, having lost everything? But it was no longer the money that disturbed me but my soul. I went over the strange conversation that we had had, and began to doubt the value of words and thoughts! But I still loved her, I still loved that cold woman with her cold heart. When I passed the Institute I suddenly began to feel hungry. But I hadn't a penny on me, and, to complete my misery the snow had destroyed my hat. How could I enter a sal^{on} in future and present myself before an elegant woman in a soiled hat?'

By extreme care, coupled with the foolish fashion that condemns us to constantly hold our hats in our hands, I had been able to preserve mine in a dubious state. Without being curiously new or obviously old, and denuded of its fur, it passed for the hat of a careful man; but it had reached the last stage of its life . . . tattered, dejected and torn, it was a worthy representative of its master. Not possessing thirty sous, I lost my painstaking elegance. How many sacrifices I had made for Féodora! I had often forfeited a week's bread to go and see her. But to desert my work and to have to fast was nothing! To have to walk through the streets of Paris without getting myself splashed, to avoid the rain and arrive at her house as elegant as the coxcombs who surrounded her, ah! that, for a lovesick and distracted poet, was certainly a difficult task! My whole future happiness depended on a speck of dirt on my white waistcoat. How could I give up seeing her if I dirtied or wet myself! I hadn't five sous to have my shoes cleaned! My love seemed to grow with all these petty considerations, magnified by a sensitive man like me. We cannot speak to women, who live in a world of luxury and elegance, of self-devotion. They see the world through a prism which paints everything gold. Made optimists by their egotism, cruel by their good breeding they are completely indifferent to any sorrow because they wrap themselves up entirely in pleasure. A penny for them could never be a million while, on the other hand, a million seems but a penny. But if they are forced to make sacrifices in love, they see that they are delicately covered with a veil and shrouded in silence. My sorrow condemned me to the most dreadful sufferings . . . but then, would you say that the mere pleasure of being near her was a sufficient reward? The Countess had completely changed my whole sense of values. I had always been indifferent towards my toilet; by now I respected my clothes . . . I would rather be wounded than allow my frock-coat to be torn! You will understand then my state of mind while I walked to Féodora's. As I neared my home I saw a beam of light thrown from the window across the

road. Pauline and her mother were waiting up for me. Suddenly I heard my name mentioned and I listened.

"'Raphael,' Pauline was saying, 'is much better than the student at Number 7! He has such pretty fair hair! Don't you find something in his voice. . . I don't know what . . . something which stirs the heart? And then, although he's a little proud, he's so good and has such distinguished manners! Oh! he's really nice! I'm sure all the women must be mad about him!'

"'You talk as if you're in love with him,' Madame Gaudin observed.

"'Oh! I only love him as a brother,' Pauline replied laughing. 'I should be pretty ungrateful if I didn't love him at all! Hasn't he taught me music, drawing, grammar and everything I know? You pay no attention to my progress, mother. But I've become so learned that I shall soon be able to give lessons, and we can have a servant.'

"I discreetly retired and, after having made a noise to announce my presence, entered the room for my lamp, which Pauline offered to light. Poor child, she had healed my wounds deliciously. That naïve eulogy gave me courage. I needed some such tonic, and to hear an impartial judgment on the true value of my assets. My hopes returned and were reflected in everything I saw around me. Or it may have been that I had never very seriously examined the room which Pauline and her mother occupied. It was really a fine scene, something like those naïve pictures which those Flemish painters have produced for us. The mother was seated in one corner of the hearth, knitting, with a benevolent smile on her lips. Pauline was working on some fire-screens. Her own colouring and the brushes spread out on a small table beside her, produced a lively effect. But when she was standing up to light my lamp, with the light full on her face, it was impossible not to admire her pink and transparent hands, the beauty of her head and her virginal attitude! The night and the silence which it brought enhanced the charm of that peaceful scene. The continuous work which they undertook

almost gaily revealed a noble and religious resignation. An indefinable harmony existed between things and persons. The cold luxury of Feodora's home awoke my passion, but that humble misery and natural goodness refreshed my soul. Perhaps I felt humiliated in the presence of luxury. When I was near Pauline, while she was lighting my lamp, she glanced at me and suddenly exclaimed:

"'God! But you look pale! Ah! he's all wet! Mother please . . . You're partial to milk, aren't you Monsieur Raphael? We've had some cream this evening, would you like to taste some?'

"She pounced like a small cat on a porcelain bowl of milk, and gave it to me so gently that I hesitated.

"'Your'e not refusing?' she said in an altered voice.

"But in our pride we understood each other. Pauline seemed to become aware of her poverty and to reproach me for my haughtiness. I immediately softened. The cream was perhaps her breakfast for the next day, but I accepted. The poor girl tried to hide her joy but it sparkled in her eyes.

"'I need it,' I said sitting down. 'Well, since I shall have to be leaving soon I want to thank you both for the kindness you've shown me.'

"'Oh! that's nothing!' Pauline replied laughing, trying to hide her emotion.

"'My piano,' I continued as if I hadn't heard her, 'is one of Erard's best instruments. Take it. I don't think I shall be able to take it on the journey I'm going to make.'

"The melancholy tone in which these words were said aroused the two women, who looked at me with a curiosity mixed with fear. The affection that I had searched for in the cold regions of the wide world I found there at that moment sincere, without pomp and durable.

"'There's no need for any anxiety,' the mother said. 'Stay here. My husband's on his way home at this moment. This evening, while I read the Gospel of St. John, Pauline held up the Bible with our key attached to it . . . and it turned. That proves that Gaudin is well and prosperous.'

We'll be rich. Gaudin will return a millionaire. I saw him in a dream on a boat full of serpents. And the water was disturbed, which signifies gold and gems from across the seas.'

"Those empty but friendly words, like the vague songs with which a mother soothes the fears of her child, calmed me. The tone and the look of that good woman expressed that friendly concern which, though it may not efface unhappiness, yet appeased and deadened it. More intelligent than her mother, Pauline stared at me carefully and anxiously. I thanked both the mother and the daughter and retired. When I found myself alone in my room, my fatal imagination conjured up a thousand baseless plans and dictated the most absurd decisions. Many men, even in their ruin, still possess some resources, but I had nothing. Ah! my dear friend, we condemn poverty and misery too readily. We should be more indulgent towards it, because it is the most lively of all social solvents. Where there is misery you find neither shame, crime, virtue nor intellect. At that moment I felt weak, like a young girl on her knees before a tiger. A man who is poor and not the prey of passion is master of himself. Love is a sort of religion for most of us and we only respect ourselves in the lives of others. It is then that it becomes the most horrible of all sorrows, the hopeful sorrow, which makes you endure the tortures. I fell asleep having resolved to visit Rastignac the next day and to tell him of Feodora's singular resolve.

"'Ah! Ah!' Rastignac exclaimed when he saw me enter his room at 9 o'clock the next morning. 'I know why you're here . . . Feodora's dismissed you. Some good people, jealous of your influence over the Countess, have announced your marriage. God knows the follies of your rivals and the calumnies of which you have been the object!'

"'Explain yourself!' I said.

"'I remember how sublimely the Countess always behaved towards my own impertinences. I was then a villain who had not suffered enough, and I did not see in her indulgence the patient charity of love.'

" 'Not so fast,' I said to the Gascon.

" 'Feodora possesses the penetrating mind natural to all women who are profoundly egotistical. She must have judged you at a moment when you were thinking of anything but her fortune and her luxury. In spite of yourself she must have read your very soul. I think I've put you on the wrong path. In spite of her fine mind and manners, Feodora seems to be too imperious, like all women who enjoy only intellectual pleasures. For her, happiness is wholly in social well-being. Sentiment with her is mere play-acting . . .'

"Rastignac spoke to the deaf. I interrupted him and told him, with apparent gaiety, of my financial position.

" 'Yesterday evening', he told me, 'everything I had was taken away from me, otherwise I would have willingly shared my purse with you. But, anyway, let's have some dinner, we may meet some fools. . . .'

"He dressed himself and, looking like two millionaires, we arrived at the Paris Café. The Gascon confounded me by the ease of his manners and his imperturbable aplomb. As we finished our dinner Rastignac, when he saw one of those elegantly dressed dandies enter, suddenly turned to me and whispered:

" 'Here's your chance.'

"And he waved to the man, who seemed to be looking for a convenient table where he could talk to someone.

" 'That libertine', Rastignac whispered, 'has been decorated for having published some books which he himself does not understand. He's a chemist, a historian, a novelist, and a publicist. He has a share in I don't know how many theatres and is as ignorant as Dom Miguel's donkey. He's not a man, he's a name, a familiar public label. In two words he's a moral half-caste, being neither fully honest nor completely a knave. He's what the world knows as an honourable man . . . Well, my dear friend, and how are you?' Rastignac said to the stranger when he sat down at a neighbouring table.

"Neither good nor bad... I'm overwhelmed with work, I have the necessary material for a volume of historical memoirs, but I don't know under whose name to publish it. That's worrying me... and I must work fast, because memoirs are going out of fashion."

"Are they contemporary or old memoirs, and on what?"

"On Collier's affair."

"Isn't that a miracle?" Rastignac said laughing. 'Monsieur Valentine,' he continued, pointing towards me, 'is a friend of mine and a future celebrity. He once had an aunt at Court, a Duchess, and for the past two years he's been working on a Royalist history of the Revolution'. He leaned towards the stranger and whispered: 'He's a talented man, but a fool. You can publish your memoirs under his aunt's name at a hundred crowns a volume.'

"Agreed," replied the other, raising his cravat. 'Waiter, my oysters, quickly!'

"Yes, but I want twentyfive louis as my commission and you must pay me in advance for the first volume."

"No, no, I'll advance you only fifty crowns."

"Rastignac repeated this conversation to me in a whisper and then, without waiting for a reply, turned to the stranger and said:

"We agree. When can we conclude this business?"

"Meet me here at 7 o'clock tomorrow."

"We rose. Rastignac gave the waiter some money, put the bill in his pocket, and we left. I was stupefied by the frivolous and indifferent manner in which he had sold my respectable aunt, the Duchess of Montbaucron."

"I prefer to go to Brazil and teach the Indians Algebra, of which I don't know a word, than soil the name of my family!"

"Rastignac burst out laughing."

"You're a fool!" he said. "Take the fifty crowns, but when the Memoirs are completed, refuse to have them published under your aunt's name. The Duchess of Montbaucron, her beauty and her slippers are altogether worth about six hundred francs. If the bookseller won't

pay you that sum, he could easily find some old industrial Knight or some disreputable Countess to sign the memoirs.'

"'Oh!' I exclaimed, 'why did I leave my virtuous garret? The world is filthy and ignoble!'

"'You're still a child. Listen to me. As for the Memoirs, of course, the public will judge their worth, but don't you think you're being paid handsomely for a very unequal share in the work? Besides twentyfive louis is a much bigger sum for you than a thousand francs for him.'

"'In other words,' I said with emotion, 'I need the money, and I must thank you for it. Twentyfive louis will make me very rich...'

"'...And much richer than you think,' he replied laughing. 'If Finot gives me my commission, don't you think I'd give it to you? But let's go to the Boulogne Woods. Your Countess will be there, and I'll show you the pretty widow I'm going to marry, a charming person. She reads Kant, Schiller, Jean-Paul and a whole crowd of other hydraulic books. It's become a mania with her to ask me my opinion. I have to pretend to understand German sentimentality and a heap of ballads. I haven't yet been able to break her off from her literary enthusiasm. If she cries over some passage from Goethe, I'm obliged to cry with her. But after all she gets fifty thousand pounds and she has the prettiest hands and feet in the world!...'

"We saw the Countess in a beautiful carriage. She graciously wished us and threw me a smile that I thought was divine and full of love. Ah! how happy I was! I felt she still loved me! Light, gay and contented, I found my friend's mistress charming. Everything around me, the trees, the air, the sky and all nature, seemed to reflect Feodora's smile. When we returned by the Champs-Élysées we went to Rastignac's hatter and tailor. The Collier affair placed me at a definite advantage. In future I would be able to compete with the elegant and graceful young men who bustled around Feodora. When I returned home, I shut myself up in my room and sat by my window. I reviewed my life, its joys and its sorrows. How tempest-

tuous a life one can lead even between the four walls of a garret! The human soul is like a fairy that removes the flaw in diamonds and, under her wand, enchanted palaces appear like flowers in the field under the warm rays of the sun.... The following day, at about midday, Pauline knocked at my door, and brought me... can you guess what? A letter from Feodora! The Countess wanted me to take her to the Luxembourg, and from there to go on to the Museum and the Gardens.

"The commissionaire's waiting for a reply,' Pauline told me after a moment's silence.

"I promptly scribbled a letter which Pauline took down for me. I dressed, but when I had nearly completed my toilet, a cold shiver ran down my spine. Would Feodora want to walk or go in a carriage? Would it be fine, or would it rain? And whether she walks or goes in a carriage can one be certain of a woman's mind? She won't have any money on her and would ask me to give an urchin a hundred sous because his rags are so pretty.

"I hadn't a farthing on me, and would only get some money that evening. Oh! in such crises how dearly a poet pays for the intellectual strength in which he has invested by hard work and starvation! A thousand horrible thoughts pricked my mind like so many darts. I looked at the sky from the window and the weather seemed most uncertain. I may have to engage a carriage for the day. Would not the thought of not meeting Finot that evening interfere with my happiness? I did not feel strong enough to endure so many fears. In spite of the certainty of finding nothing, I attempted a thorough search of my room. I looked for imaginary crowns at the bottom of my straw mattress, I explored everything, even an old pair of shoes. After having turned my furniture upside down I stared dejectedly at it. Can you imagine my joy when, on opening my writing table drawer for the seventh time, I saw indolently stuck on one of the boards, crouching cunningly in a corner, but clean and brilliant like a star, a beautiful hundred-sou coin? I questioned neither its silence nor its guilt by hiding itself.

but kissed it as a friend of the unfortunate and greeted it with a cry that echoed through the house. Pauline, as pale as a wall, appeared at the door.

"'I-thought', she said in a shaky voice, 'you were ill! The commissionaire . . . but it doesn't matter, my mother paid him . . .'

"She ran out of the room. Poor child! I wish she could have shared my joy. At that moment my soul seemed to have been filled with all the happiness in the world, and I felt I should restore to the miserable what I had stolen from them. We are nearly always correct in our presentiments of adversity. The Countess had sent away her carriage. By one of those unexplainable caprices of almost all pretty women she had decided to walk to the Gardens.

"'But it's going to rain,' I told her.

"But she seemed to take pleasure in doing exactly the contrary. Fortunately, it was fine all the time we were in the Luxembourg. Soon, however, a dark threatening cloud appeared in the sky and we were forced to take a carriage. When we reached the boulevards, the rain stopped and the sky became clear. I wanted to dismiss the carriage at the Museum, but Feodora insisted that I keep it. What torture! But I soon forgot about it as I wandered with her down the shady alleys of the Gardens, feeling the pressure of her arm on mine. It was like dreaming in broad daylight and I'm sure she must have discovered my happiness because I had a silly smile on my face. But there was nothing amorous in her movements in spite of their apparent voluptuousness. And when I tried, in our conversation, to associate myself with her life, she revealed an eccentric and incomprehensible vivacity. There seemed to be nothing to bring us together. It is impossible to describe the discord which exists between two people, because we have not yet learnt to see a thought behind a movement. We can only feel it instinctively but cannot express it.

"During those violent paroxysms of my heart," Raphael continued after a moment's silence, as if replying to a question which he himself had raised, "I did not dissect my

sensations, analyse my happiness or count the beats of my heart, as a miser might examine and weigh his gold. Oh, no! But today experience throws her melancholy light on those past events, and the memory throws them up again as the sea, bit by bit, throws up the débris of a shipwreck on the beach.

"'You can do me an important favour,' the Countess told me, a little confused. 'Surely I could ask you, at least in the name of friendship?'

"I looked at her unhappily. Far from being friendly and affectionate, she seemed to be smirking at me. But she was a consummate actress. The tone of her voice and the look in her face suddenly changed and with it my hopes revived.

"'The presence of the Duke of Navarriens,' she continued in a cajoling voice, 'near a most powerful person in Russia would be most useful to me, and his intervention might bring justice to bear on an affair which at the same time concerns both my fortune and my place in the world, that is, the recognition of my marriage to the Emperor. Isn't he your cousin? A letter from him would decide everything.'

"'I shall do whatever you ask me,' I told her.

"'You're so good,' she said patting my hand. 'Have dinner with me, I'll tell you everything.'

"The woman who was so mistrustful and discreet, from whom nobody had heard anything about her life, was going to confide in me. We drove to her home. I emptied my pockets to satisfy the coachman. But I had spent a beautiful day, alone with the Countess. It was the first time I had enjoyed such a privilege. Up to that time, the world, with its awkward politeness and cold customs, had separated us, even during her sumptuous dinners. But at that moment I felt that I lived under her roof and that she was mine. My yagabond imagination removed all the obstacles in my way, arranged the events of her life to my liking and plunged me in happiness. I admired her busy over some minor details, as a husband might, and took pride in helping her

to remove her hat and shawl. She left me for a moment and then returned with her hair arranged and looking charming. She had done that for me! During dinner she was most attentive and charming about a thousand things, which, though small, were half her life. When we were alone together before a bright fire, surrounded by the most desirable of oriental luxuries, when I saw that woman, whose celebrated beauty sent all hearts palpitating and who was so difficult to conquer, seated next to me talking to me, my happiness bordered on suffering. To my misfortune I remembered that I had to meet Finot.

"'So soon?' she asked when she saw me taking my hat.

"She loved me! At least that's what I believed when I heard her pronounce those two words in a caressing voice. To prolong my ecstasy I would have gladly bartered two years of my life for each hour that she wanted me to stay. My happiness increased in spite of the money I had lost! It was midnight before she sent me away. Nevertheless, it cost me many anxieties, because I was afraid that I had lost the business of the memoirs. I ran to see Rastignac and together we awoke Finot early next morning. He read out a short agreement, in which there was no mention of my aunt, and when it had been signed, he paid me fifty francs. All three of us had breakfast together. When I had paid for my new hat and cleared my other debts, I had only thirty francs left. But most of my difficulties were removed, at least for some days. From that day I broke away from the monastic and studious life I had led for three years. I went regularly to see Feodora, and strove to surpass in appearance the extravagances of the coterie that was usually to be found in her home. Believing myself to have escaped forever from misery, I regained my mental freedom, easily defeated my rivals and altogether passed for a charming and irresistible person. However, there were people who charitably praised my intellect at the expense of my feelings. Some remarked that I could never be so gay and lively if I had been a slave of love. But I was stupidly amorous in the presence of Feodora! When I was alone with her, I

was often speechless and, when I did speak, I felt foolish. Behind my gaiety I hid a frightful sorrow, like a courtesan. I tried to make myself indispensable in Feodora's life and her happiness. I would be with her almost every day, her slave, constantly at her beck and call. After having wasted practically the whole day I would return home to work all night, sleeping only for about two or three hours. I soon, however, found myself penniless and, vain and elegant without money, in love with a chimera, I returned to that precarious existence in which my profound unhappiness was carefully hidden under the deceitful appearance of luxury. But my sufferings this time were less acute, I had probably become too familiar with them. Often the only food I ate was the cake and tea so parsimoniously offered at the salons. The sumptuous dinners that the Countess sometimes gave kept me up for nearly two days. I used all my time, my efforts and my knowledge to understand the impenetrable character of Feodora. Up to that time hope and despair had influenced my attitude towards her, and in turn I would regard her as the most loving and the most indifferent woman. But those alternations of joy and sorrow soon became intolerable. I wanted to settle matters once and for all, and put an end to the horrible struggle in my mind and soul. I knew that a great abyss existed between us, and the Countess justified all my fears. I had never seen her cry and, at the theatre, a tender scene would find her cold and mocking. She reserved all her feelings for herself and understood neither the joys nor the sorrows of others. Ready to make any sacrifice for her, I very nearly disgraced myself by visiting my relative the Duke of Navarriens, a conceited man who was openly ashamed of my poverty. He received me with that cold politeness which made his words and his gestures seem like insults. But his uneasiness only excited my pity, and I in turn was ashamed of his pettiness in the midst of so much grandeur and his poverty in the midst of so much luxury. After some inconsequential chatter I told him the object of my visit. The change in his manner, from cold indifference to

affectation, disgusted me. Well, he went to see the Countess. She seemed to have found in him some unknown charm, completely seduced him and discussed, without my knowledge, that mysterious business of which I knew not a word. I had been only a means for her . . . ! She seemed not to be aware of me when my cousin was with her, and she received me with less pleasure than when I was first presented to her. One evening she humiliated me before the Duke with one of those looks and gestures of hers which it is impossible to describe. I left the house almost in tears, with a thousand plans of vengeance, including rape and murder . . . I would often accompany her to a concert, and seated next to her, would contemplate her beauty while listening to the music, exhausting my soul in the double joy of love and music. I would then take Feodora's hand and study her features and her eyes, soliciting a fusion of our feelings, that sudden harmony, which, awakened by the music, could make our souls vibrate in unison. But her hand was dead and her eyes dumb. When she noticed that the fire of my passion revealed itself on almost every one of my features, she would only throw me one of those affected smiles which are so easily produced on the lips of those who frequent the salons. She was not listening to the music. The divine compositions of Rossini, Cimarosa and Zingarelli awakened no feeling in her. Her soul was arid. Feodora presented herself at the concert like a spectacle within a spectacle. Her lorgnette incessantly travelled from box to box. Although outwardly tranquil, she was uneasy, because she was the victim of fashion. Her box, her cap, her carriage and her person meant everything to her. You often meet people who, under a hard bronze-like appearance, hide a delicate and tender heart, but Feodora hid a heart of bronze under a frail and gracious exterior. With my scientific knowledge I could read her like an open book. If good breeding consisted in being thoughtful of others, being kind to them and trying to make them happy, then Feodora, in spite of her refinement, had not quite effaced all traces of her plebeian origin. When she showed

consideration for others it was mere hypocrisy, and her manners, instead of being inborn, had been laboriously acquired. But her favourites found her honeyed words the expression of her goodness, and her pretentious exaggeration a noble enthusiasm. I alone had studied her carefully and stripped her of the thin bark which was sufficient for the world and she could no longer deceive me. I knew the dainty woman to the very bottom of her soul. When some fool complimented or praised her I felt ashamed. And yet I always loved her! I wanted to thaw that cold exterior of hers. If I could only open her heart to the inherent tenderness of women, if I could initiate her into the sublimity of devotion, I would have seen her as a perfect being. . . . She would have become an angel. Unfortunately, I loved her as a man and a poet. Any conceited or cunning fool could have perhaps triumphed over her. Vain and artificial herself, she would have responded readily to the language of vanity. It made me sad to think that one day perhaps she would find herself without a friend in the world, leading a lonely life. One evening I had the courage to tell her so and she replied:

"I'll always have money; with gold one can create the atmosphere necessary for a comfortable life."

"I was thunder-struck by her logic and cursed myself for being so stupidly enamoured of her life of luxury. If I could not love Pauline, hadn't rich Feodora the right to reject Raphael? Our conscience is an infallible guide if we have not already killed it. Mine told me that Feodora neither loved nor repelled anyone. She was now free, but had once sold herself for gold. As a lover or a husband the Russian Count must have possessed her. Neither virtuous nor deformed, she lived far from humanity in a world of her own, whatever it was, hell or paradise. That mysterious woman, dressed in silks and embroidery awakened every human sentiment, love, ambition and curiosity in my heart. . . . Either from some fashionable caprice, or the desire to appear original, she liked to make a spectacle of herself in the boulevard. Once the Countess wanted to see

some actress or other, and I had the honour to take her to the first presentation of I do not know what idiotic farce. The box hardly cost a hundred sous but I didn't possess a single farthing. I dared not go to Finot, and Rastignac was away. Once, coming out of the theatre, the rain suddenly came down and Feodora walked towards a carriage. I could not escape. She would not listen to any of my excuses, not even when I told her that I loved the rain. She could not guess that I had no money, either from my embarrassed attitude or my sadly pleasant words. My face was turning red, but do you think she understood? The life of a young man is subject to singular caprices. On the way home, each turn awoke thoughts which gnawed at my heart. I tried to detach a board from the floor of the carriage hoping to be able to slide on to the road. But there were too many obstacles against me and I began to laugh convulsively. With the first words I stammered out when we reached our destination, Feodora interrupted me saying:

"You have no money?..."

"Ah! the music of Rossini was nothing compared with those words! To be able to take the Countess there I thought of using the gold which framed my mother's portrait. Although the pawnshop always seemed to me like the doors leading into prison, it would have been better to carry my own bed than solicit for charity. The expression on a man's face when you ask for money is sickening! To borrow often costs us our honour. just as a refusal by a friend gets rid of a last illusion.

"Pauline was working and her mother lying down. I glanced furtively towards the bed, the curtains of which were slightly apart, and when I saw Madame Gaudin's calm profile against the pillows, I thought she must be asleep.

"What's the matter, you look very sad,' said Pauline putting her paint brush down.

"My poor child, you can do me a great service,' I replied.

"She looked up at me so happily that I was startled. Did she love me?

‘Pauline . . .’ I said. I sat down next to her. She probably guessed what I wanted from the tone of my voice. She lowered her eyes as I was able to read her heart as if it were mine, it was so pure and naïve.

‘Do you love me?’ I asked her.

‘A little . . . passionately! . . . not at all!’ she exclaimed.

‘I waited for a moment and then told her of the embarrassing position in which I was and begged her to help.

‘But,’ she said, ‘you don’t want to go to the pawnshop, and yet you want to send me there!’

‘I blushed, confounded by the young girl’s logic. She took my hand and caressed it as if to compensate for what she had said.

‘Oh, I’ll go,’ she said, ‘but it’s unnecessary. This morning I found two 100-sou coins behind the piano and I’ve left them on your table.

‘You’ll soon get some money, Monsieur Raphael,’ the mother suddenly said peeping through the curtains. ‘I can lend you some in the meantime.’

‘Oh, Pauline!’ I exclaimed shaking her hand. ‘I want to be rich!’

‘Good gracious, why?’ she said petulantly.

‘Her trembling hand was in mine and it reasoned to every beat of my heart. She began to read my palm.

‘You’ll marry a rich woman,’ she said, ‘but she’ll bring you a lot of sorrow. She’ll kill you! . . . I’m sure of it!’

‘The tone of her voice revealed a belief in the same foolish superstitions as her mother.

‘You’re very credulous, Pauline,’

‘Of course,’ she said, looking at me terrified, ‘the woman you love will one day kill you!’

‘She took up her brush, dipped it in a colour, and started to work. At that moment I would have liked to believe in superstitions. A man who believes in superstitions cannot suddenly become miserable, because superstitions are often hopes. When I entered my room I saw the two crowns. Their presence seemed to me inexplicable. In the middle of those confused thoughts just before I

dropped asleep, I tried to verify my expenses, but fell asleep lost in futile calculations. The next day, when I was about to leave to book a box, Pauline walked into my room.

"'Perhaps the money you have won't be enough,' she said blushing. 'My mother told me to give you this... take it, take it!'

"She placed three crowns on my table, and was about to run away when I held her back. Admiration dried the tears which rolled down my eyes.

"'Pauline,' I said, 'you're an angel! I love the modesty with which that loan has been offered. I've always wanted to meet a rich, elegant and titled woman, but now I want to be rich and meet a poor young girl like you. I want to renounce the fatal passion which will perhaps one day kill me. You're right.'

"'Enough!' she said, running out of the room, the thrills of her nightingale voice echoing down the staircase.

"'She's fortunate not to have fallen in love yet!' I said to myself, thinking of the many sorrows I had endured during the past few months.

"Pauline's fifty francs were very useful to me. Feodora, because of the vulgar odours in the room where we had to wait for some hours, regretted not having brought a bouquet. I went out to look for some flowers and very nearly spent my whole fortune on a bunch. When I presented the bouquet to her I felt both remorse and pleasure, because it revealed to me all the superficial gallantry of the world of luxury. She soon began to grumble at the strong smell of the jasmin, took an intolerable disgust to the room and, finding herself seated on a hard bench, reproached me for having taken her there. Although she was near me, she wanted to leave and went. To have endured sleepless nights, dissipated so much money and not to have pleased her! Never was there a woman more gracious or more unfeeling. On the way back, seated next to her in the narrow carriage, I inhaled her breath, touched her perfumed glove and distinctly saw every treasure of her beauty. She was every inch a woman and yet not a woman.

"To resist the love of a man of my age, the communicative warmth of that beautiful contagion of the soul, Feodora must be guarding some secret," I said to myself. 'Could she, like Lady Delacour, be suffering from cancer? Her life is most unnatural.'

"With that thought my whole body went cold. I formed the most extravagant and, at the same time, the most reasonable plan a lover could think out. To examine her body as I had examined her mind, I decided to spend a night in her home, in her room, without her knowledge. This is how I carried out the plan, which ate into my heart like vengeance gnawing the heart of a Corsican monk. When Feodora gave a reception, so many people were present that it was impossible for the doorkeeper to keep an exact balance between those who entered and those who left. Sure of remaining in the house without causing any scandal, I waited impatiently for the Countess' next reception. While dressing I put a small English knife into my pocket. Found, on me it would not have excited any suspicion, and I wanted to protect myself because I did not know where my romantic plot might lead me.

"When the rooms were gradually being emptied, I went into the bedroom and found the Venetian shutters closed. That was my first piece of good luck. I loosened the curtain bands. I perhaps risked much by anticipating the work of the maid, but I had coldly calculated every step and was fully aware of the perils of my position. Towards midnight I hid myself in the embrasure of the window. Not to allow my feet to be seen I climbed to the plinth of the wainscoting, and, with my back against the wall, held on firmly to the window. After having studied my balance and measured the distance which separated me from the curtains, I succeeded in familiarising myself with the difficulties of my position and how to remain there without being discovered. Not to tire myself needlessly I stood up and waited for the critical moment when I should have to remain suspended from the window like a spider. The folds of the white silk curtains were like the pipes of an

organ and I made a few holes in them with my knife. I could still vaguely hear the murmur of voices and laughter, but gradually it died down. Some men came to take their hats from the table which was quite near me, and, when they grazed past the curtains, I shivered with fear. But nothing unfortunate occurred, which seemed to augur well for my enterprise. The last hat was carried away by an old friend of the Countess. Believing himself to be alone, he glanced sadly at the bed and heaved a heavy sigh, which was followed by some indistinct exclamation. When almost all had left, the Countess entertained five or six of her most intimate friends in the boudoir next to her bedroom. Calumnies mingled with epigrams, and intellectual judgments with the clatter of cups and spoons. Pitiless towards my rivals, Rastignac aroused some rather foolish laughter by his caustic wit.

"'Monsieur Rastignac is a man we cannot afford to annoy,' said the Countess laughing.

"'Yes, I suppose so,' replied Rastignac naïvely. 'I've always been right in my hatreds . . . and in my friendships. Perhaps both my enemies and my friends serve me equally well. I have made a special study of modern idiom and those natural artifices by which everything is attacked and everything defended. One of your friends possesses no intellect at all and you praise his probity and his frankness, the work of another is ugly and you praise it as a conscientious piece of work, and if the book is badly written you praise the ideas. Such a person is both faithless and inconstant, yet charming and interesting!'

"One of Feodora's most fervent admirers, a young man who was famous for his insolence, took up the challenge so scornfully thrown out by Rastignac. He began to talk of me, to praise my talents and my person. The Countess was taken in by his sardonic eulogy and began to attack me. To amuse her friends, she revealed some of my secrets, my pretensions and my hopes.

"'He has a future,' Rastignac said, 'and his talent is equal to his courage'.

"'He must have courage,' the Countess replied. 'He's faithful to me!'

"A sudden temptation to reveal myself like the ghost of Banquo in *Macbeth* suddenly overtook me. I would have perhaps lost a mistress, but I had a friend! A voice however whispered one of those mean and subtle paradoxes by which our sorrows are often lulled to sleep. 'If Feodora loves you,' it said, 'mustn't she hide her affection under a malicious joke? Hasn't the heart often contradicted what is openly said?'

"Later, my insolent rival, who had been left alone with the Countess, wanted to leave.

"'What, so soon?' the Countess said in a voice so full of emotion that it made me shudder. 'Won't you stay a little longer? Have you nothing to say to me?'

"But he left.

"'Ah!' she exclaimed yawning. 'They're all so annoying!'

"She pulled a cord and the noise of a bell echoed through the rooms. Entering her bedroom she began to sing a few bars from *Pria che spunti*. No one had ever heard her sing, which had given rise to a lot of bizarre comments. Some said that her first lover had made her promise never to reveal her talent and to take it with her to the grave. Note by note her voice rose. Feodora seemed carried away, and the beautiful richness of her voice turned the melody into something divine. Her voice possessed a tone and charm which stirred and soothed the heart. Musicians are nearly always amorous and those who could sing like the Countess must be capable of love. The beauty of her voice was, therefore, one more mystery in an already mysterious woman. I saw her then as I see you now. She seemed to be listening attentively to herself and revealed a voluptuousness which was extraordinary for her. She walked towards the fireplace finishing the principal motif of the rondo. When she was silent her voice changed, her features became distorted and her face expressed fatigue, but yet it was not without its charm.

"'Here's her true self!' I said to myself. To warm herself she placed a foot on the bronze bar before the fireplace, took off her gloves, her bracelets and her gold chain at the end of which hung a perfuming-pan of precious stones. She looked at herself in the glass.

"'I was not at all pretty this evening . . .,' she said aloud in a discontented voice. 'My colour faded frightfully soon . . . I must give up this life of dissipation . . . But what's the matter with Justine?'

"She rang the bell again. The maid suddenly appeared. I could not tell you from where, probably down some secret staircase.

"'Did Madam ring?'

"'Twice!' replied Feodora. 'You haven't gone deaf now, have you?'

"'I was making the almond milk for Madam.'

"While Feodora reclined on a sofa in a corner of the fireplace, yawned and nonchalantly scratched her head, Justine untied her shoes and pulled off her stockings. All her movements were perfectly natural and revealed no symptom of the secret sufferings that I had presumed.

"'Georges must be in love', she said. 'Why hasn't he drawn the curtains?'

"When I heard those words my heart began to beat fast, but the Countess almost immediately forgot about the curtains.

"'Life is so empty,' she said. 'Take care, now, don't scratch me as you did yesterday. Look,' she said lifting up a small foot, 'I still have the marks.'

"She put her nude feet into velvet slippers and, when she had taken off her dress, Justine arranged her hair with a comb.

"'You should get married and have children, Madam!'

"'Children! That would finish me! And a husband! Which man do you think . . . ? Did I look nice this evening?'

"'Of course, Madam.'

"'You're a fool!'

"'You shouldn't frizzle your hair out so much,' Justine said. 'Large curls suit you best.'

"'Really?'

"'Yes, Madam, frizzy hair only suits blondes.'

"'You think I should marry? No, no! I wasn't born for marriage.'

"What a frightful scene for lover to witness! She was so lonely, without relatives or friends and so atheistic in love that she had to bring herself down to talk to her maid! I pitied her. Justine unlaced her. I watched her closely as the last garment was being taken off. Her virgin waist fascinated me, and her beautiful white body shone like a silver statue under the candlelight. No, there was no imperfection to make her dread the furtive eyes of love. She sat down before the fire, silent and thoughtful, while the maid lit the candle of the alabaster lamp which stood before her bed. Justine then fetched a warming-pan, prepared the bed, and helped her mistress to lie down. After some time had been devoted to those minute services, which revealed the profound love Feodora had for herself, Justine left. The Countess tossed about for some time in her bed. She was apparently worried, and she often sighed. Light, audible sounds now and again escaped from her lips. She stretched out her hand towards the table, picked up a phial, and poured two or three drops of some brown liquid into her milk before drinking it. Then after some painful sighs, she exclaimed: 'My God!'

"That exclamation, and above all the tone in which it was said, nearly broke my heart. She remained silent. For a moment I was afraid that something had happened, but I soon heard the strong and measured respiration of a person asleep. I opened the curtains, stepped out of my hiding place and, standing at the foot of her bed, looked down at her. She was ravishing. She had her head on her arm like a child and her pretty and tranquil face had such beautiful expression that it moved me. I had never understood the extent of my torture till then. To be so near and yet so far away! I was forced to suffer all the tortures that I had

prepared for myself. 'My God!' that fragment of some unknown strain of thought had suddenly changed my ideas about Feodora. Those words, whether they were really insignificant or profound, unsubstantial or full of reality, could have been interpreted equally as happiness or sorrow, physical suffering or pain. Was it a curse or a prayer, a remembrance or an expectation, a regret or a fear? There seemed to be a whole life story behind them. The enigma of Feodora, that beautiful semblance of a woman, could be explained in so many ways, that she became quite inexplicable. Her breath, which was now feeble and now hard, formed for me a sort of language, to which I attached thoughts and feelings. I imagined myself dreaming with her and, by sharing her sleep, I hoped to learn some of her secrets. When I saw that calm, beautiful and pure face it was impossible for me to resist. I resolved to make yet another attempt. If perhaps I related my life, my love for her and my sacrifices, it might arouse her pity and draw from her, who had never cried, a tear. I placed all my hopes in that last gamble. The rising tempo of the noise on the street outside announced that a new day had dawned. For a moment I imagined what I would be like to have Feodora awake in my arms. The idea tantalised me so much that, in order to resist it, I left the room hurriedly without taking the necessary precautions. But fortunately I came across a narrow staircase. I boldly descended into the courtyard, and, without noticing whether I had been seen or not, leaped towards the street in three bounds.

"Two days later a writer had to read his play at the Countess'. I was present, having decided to remain to the last to make a most singular request. I wanted to ask her to see me alone the next evening. When I found myself alone with her, my heart failed me, and with each stroke of the clock my fear grew. It was a quarter to twelve.

" 'If I don't speak to her,' I said to myself, 'I'll break my head against the wall.'

"I gave myself three more minutes, but when they had

passed my head was still intact and my heart was as heavy as a sponge full of water.

"'You're very friendly this evening?' she said to me.

"'Ah, Madam,' I replied, 'if only you knew me!'

"'What's the matter? You're pale!'

"'I hesitate to ask you to do me a favour.'

"She encouraged me with a gesture and I made my request.

"'Of course,' she said, 'but why don't you speak to me now?'

"'I don't want to deceive you,' I said. 'I want to spend the evening with you as if we were brother and sister. You know me sufficiently well to realise that I don't want to do anything that may displease you. You've been a friend to me, and most good and indulgent. Well, I have to say goodbye to you tomorrow . . . don't go back on your word!' I added when I saw her about to speak. And I left.

"The next day, at about 8 o'clock in the evening, I found myself alone with Feodora in her gothic boudoir. I was not at all afraid, because I knew that we must arrive at some definite understanding. Either Feodora must belong to me or I should have to take refuge in the arms of death. Dressed in blue, she was stretched out on a divan with her feet on a cushion. An oriental cap, and a hair style that painters attribute to the early Hebrews, added an indescribable, strange and piquant attraction to her seductions. Her face had a fugitive charm which seemed to prove that at each moment we are new and unique beings with no relation with our past or our future. I have never seen her looking so charming.

"'Do you know,' she said 'that you've excited my curiosity?'

"'I won't deceive you,' I replied coldly, sitting down next to her and taking her hand. 'You have a beautiful voice.'

"'But you've never heard it,' she said with surprise.

"'I shall prove the contrary when it is necessary,' I said. 'But don't be alarmed.'

"We chatted familiarly for nearly an hour. If I assumed the air of a man whom Feodora must refuse nothing, I was also as attentive as a lover. She even allowed me to kiss her hand. She took off her gloves with such a delicate movement, and I was then so voluptuously forced into the illusion in which I tried to believe, that my heart seemed to melt and overflow in that kiss. Feodora allowed herself to be flattered and caressed with incredible abandon. But I was not a fool, I knew my limits. If I had taken a step further than that brotherly kiss, I would have felt the claws of a cat. We remained for about ten minutes plunged in profound silence. At that moment she seemed to be mine... I possessed her as much as it was possible to possess that ravishing woman. But I did not want her body, I wanted her soul, her life, and to realise that complete and ideal happiness, that beautiful dream in which most of us believe and strive for.

" 'Madam,' I said, feeling that the last hour of my intoxication had arrived, 'please listen to me. I love you, you know that, I've said so a thousand times, and you must listen to me. I don't want to flatter myself, but I've been misunderstood. How many tortures I have suffered for you! There are two kinds of sorrow, Madam, the one which walks insolently along the roads in rags, and the other the misery of luxury, which hides beggary under a title, and is proudly emplumed in white vests and yellow gloves. One is the misery of the people, the other that of swindlers, kings and men of talent. I neither belong to the people, nor am I a king or a swindler. Perhaps I have some talent, but I'm certainly an exception. My name forces me to die rather than beg... Don't be afraid, I am not going to do anything of the kind,' I added when I saw her face assume that cold expression which sometimes makes its appearance when one is shocked. 'Do you remember the day I followed you to the Gymnasium?'

"She made an affirmative sign with her head.

" 'I used my last crown to see you there... Do you

remember the walk we went for? And the carriage we took later exhausted my entire fortune!

"I related all the misfortunes of my life, not as I relate it now, drunk with wine, but drunk with love. My passion overflowed with flamboyant words and sentiments which I have forgotten, and which neither art nor memory could reproduce. But the narration was not without warmth. My love, in both its strength and in the beauty of its hope, inspired me to fully describe my life as the echo of a wounded heart. And the tone in which they were said resembled the last words used by a dying man on the field of battle. She cried. I stopped. I had been a successful actor—those tears were the fruit of that artificial emotion which could be bought for 100 sous at the door of any theatre.

"'If I had only known . . . ' She began.

"'Don't say it,' I replied, 'I still love you sufficiently to want to kill you . . . '

"She made to ring for a servant, and I burst into laughter.

"'Don't,' I said, 'I'll leave you to peacefully complete your life. It would be worse to be hated than to kill you! I won't use any violence . . . I've spent a whole night at the foot of your bed . . . '

"'Monsieur . . . ' she said blushing.

"But after that first modest protest, which is so characteristic of all women, even the most insensible, she looked scornfully at me and said:

"'You must be a very cold man!'

"'Do you imagine, Madam, that I'm so fascinated by your beauty? Your face for me is merely the promise of a more beautiful soul. Ah! Madam, the men who only see a woman in a woman, who can every evening buy odalisques worthy of the scraglio and make themselves happy cheaply . . . I was more ambitious, I wanted to capture your heart, you who had no heart. I realise it now. But if you should marry someone, I'd kill him . . . How much I've suffered!'

"If the promise will console you," she said gaily. "I assure you I won't marry anyone . . ."

"You insult God himself," I said interrupting her, "and you'll be punished for it! One day, lying on a divan, unable to endure either light or noise, condemned to live in a sort of tomb, you'll suffer unheard of miseries. When you try to discover the reason for those slow and avenging miseries, remember those you have so generously flung around you! Having sown curses everywhere you'll only reap hatred."

"Ah!" she said laughing, "it's criminal of me not to love you, isn't it? Is it my fault? No, I don't love you. You're a man, that's all. I'm happier alone. Why should I subject myself to the whims of a man? Marriage is a sacrament which can only bring us misery. Besides, children annoy me.. Why shouldn't you be satisfied with my friendship? I wish I could console your sorrows, and I assure you that I really appreciate the extent of the sacrifices you have made. But I must confess that this has been a most disagreeable scene."

"I know I've made myself ridiculous," I said, hardly able to control my tears. "Excuse me. But I love you sufficiently to be able to endure your cruel words. How I wish I could prove the sincerity of my love for you!"

"All men more or less use the same classic phrases," she replied laughing. "But it's midnight . . . I must retire."

"And in two hours you'll exclaim: 'My God!'" I said.

"That was yesterday!" she said. "Yes, I was thinking of some business transaction."

"My eyes were full of anger when I looked at her. Ah! to commit a crime sometimes must be a real poem! Familiar no doubt with the most passionate declarations of love she had already forgotten my tears and my words."

"Would you marry a Peer of France?" I asked her coldly.

"Perhaps, if he's a Duke."

"I took my hat to depart."

"'Allow me to accompany you to the door,' she said ironically.

"'Madam . . .'

"'Monsieur . . .'

"'I won't see you again.'

"'I hope so,' she said, with an insolent inclination of her head.

"'You want to be a Duchess?' I said, impelled by a sort of madness in my heart. 'You like titles and honour? Then why won't you accept me, why don't you let me be your husband, your Duke . . . I'll do anything you want!'

"'I see you've profited by your studies at the solicitor's,' she replied laughing.

"'You're the present,' I exclaimed, 'and I'm the future! I merely lose a woman, but you lose a name and a family. Time will take its vengeance on you, it will bring you ugliness and a lonely death . . . but to me—glory!'

"'Thanks for the peroration!' she said suppressing a yawn and revealing by her whole attitude the desire not to see me again.

"Those words silenced me. The last glance I threw her contained all my accumulated hatred. I fled from her. I had to forget Feodora, to cure myself of my folly and either return to my studious life or die. I imposed on myself the most ambitious undertakings. For fifteen days I did not leave my garret but spent every night in the most insipid studies. But, in spite of my courage, and the inspiration which was the result of my despair, I worked with difficulty and by fits and starts. The Muse had fled from me, and I could not run after the brilliant and mocking fantom of Feodora. Each of my thoughts was covered by another sickly thought and a desire that was as terrible as remorse. I even imitated the hermits of the Egyptian desert. Without saying a prayer, I tried to live as they did, emptying my soul of every human passion. But I would have had to wear a girdle of thorns and subdue by physical pain my moral suffering.

"One evening Pauline entered my room.

"'Your'e killing yourself,' she said. 'You must go out to see your friends.'

"'Ah! Pauline, your prediction was right! Feodora has killed me . . . I want to die. Life has become unendurable,'

"'Is she the only woman in the world?' she said smiling. 'Life is so short, why suffer so much?'

"I looked up at Pauline with surprise but, when she left the room I was not aware that she had gone, and hardly grasped the meaning of the words she had uttered. Soon, however, I was obliged to take my manuscript of the memoirs to my literary entrepreneur. Preoccupied with my sorrow, I had ignored how I had been able to live without money. I only knew that the 450 francs which were due to me would be sufficient to pay up my debts. I went to fetch my money and met Rastignac.

"'Which hospital have you just left?' he said.

"'That woman has killed me,' I replied. 'I can neither scorn her nor forget her.'

"'Better kill her, then you won't think of her,' he said laughing.

"'I've thought of that,' I replied. 'But if the refreshing thought of murder or rape, or both, enters my mind, I find myself incapable of carrying it out in reality. The Countess is a charming monster . . . She'll probably demand forgiveness.'

"'She's like every other woman we cannot have,' Rastignac said.

"'I'm a fool!' I exclaimed. 'I feel so ridiculous at times. I can't even think . . . ideas appear before me like phantoms and I cannot seize them. I'd prefer to die than live like this. I've been thinking of a better way to end it all. It is no longer the living Feodora, the Feodora of Faubourg Saint-Honoré, but my Feodora, the one which is here!' I said striking my forehead. 'What do you think of opium?'

"'Atrocious!' Rastignac replied.

"'Suffocation?'

"'Too commonplace!'

" 'The Seine?'

" 'It's dirty!'

" 'A pistol?'

" 'If you miss you'll disfigure yourself for life. Now listen to me. I have, like all young men, thought of suicide. I've found that nothing is better to destroy life than pleasure. Plunge yourself into the wildest dissipation and you'll die soon enough. Intemperance, my dear friend, is the queen of all deaths. Doesn't she condemn you to the most frightful apoplexy? And isn't apoplexy a pistol shot which doesn't miss? An orgy lavishes on us every kind of physical pleasure. Isn't that like taking opium in small doses? And isn't it better to drink the liquors of the Duke of Clarence than the muddy waters of the Seine? When we fall nobly under the table isn't it a sort of apoplexy? And when the police collect us don't we enjoy the pleasures of the morgue when we lie on the cold prison bed, but without the bloated stomach? Ah! there's nothing commonplace about that long drawn out suicide. Business men have defiled the river by throwing themselves into it to soften the hearts of their creditors. If I were you I'd try to die an elegant death . . . By leading a violent life we may perhaps be able to find happiness!'

"Rastignac convinced me. His plan was too attractive and poetical not to please a poet. It awakened all my hopes.

" 'And the money?' I asked him.

" 'Haven't you got 450 francs?'

" 'Yes, but I have to pay my tailor, my landlady . . .'

" 'You pay your tailor?'

" 'But what could I do with 20 louis?'

" 'Gamble.'

"I shivered at the thought.

" 'Oh!' he said when he observed my prudishness, 'you want to fling yourself into a life of debauchery and you're afraid of the gambling table!'

" 'I promised my father never to set foot in a gambling house,' I said. 'Not only is that a sacred promise, but I'm

horrified when I so much as go near a gambling table. Take these 100 crowns and gamble with them yourself, and while you risk our fortune, I'll settle up my affairs and wait for you at your apartment.'

"And that's how I lost myself. It is enough if a young man meets a woman whom he does not love, or loves too much, to have his whole life disturbed. Happiness undermines our strength as sorrow extinguishes our virtues. When I returned home I contemplated for a long time the garret in which I had led the chaste life of a savant, a life perhaps which might have been long and honourable. While I was in this melancholy mood Pauline came in.

"'What's happened?' she said.

"I rose coldly and indifferently counted out the money I owed her mother, adding six months' rent in advance. She watched me with a terrified look on her face.

"'I'm leaving, Pauline.'

"'I knew that!' she said.

"'Listen, my child,' I said. 'This doesn't mean that I won't return. Keep my room for six months, if I don't return by November 15 you can have everything that's in it. That sealed manuscript is a copy of my great work on the will. You can send it to the library. You can do what you like with the rest of the things.'

"'I'll have no more lessons?' she said pointing to the piano.

"I did not reply.

"'Will you write to me?'

"'Goodbye, Pauline.'

"I drew her gently towards me and imprinted on her snow-white forehead a brotherly kiss. She ran away. I did not want to meet Madam Gaudin, so I placed my key in its usual niche and left. When I was on Clugny Road I suddenly heard the light footsteps of a woman behind me.

"'I embroidered this purse,' Pauline said, 'won't you take it?'

"I thought I saw the gleam of tears in her eyes and I

sighed. But moved perhaps by the same thought, we separated as hurriedly as people fleeing from the plague.

"The life of dissipation to which I had now dedicated myself appeared to me singularly symbolised by the room in which I waited indifferently for the return of Rastignac. Above the chimney was a clock surmounted by the small statue of Venus on which was balanced a half-smoked cigar. The elegant furniture were scattered. Some old socks were thrown across a voluptuous divan. The comfortable sofa-chair on which I was seated had a number of scars like an old soldier. Its arms were here and there torn, and its back was stained with the pomade and oils of friends. It was the room of a gambler or of some indifferent citizen whose luxury was all personal. But it did not altogether lack poetry. Everything, like life, was arranged with its flaws and its rags, incomplete, as it really is, but alive and fantastic. Here a candle was fastened to the green sheath of a phosphoric tinder-box, there a portrait of a woman lay stripped from its frame of embossed gold. How could a man, emotionally greedy by nature, resist the attractions of a life so full of inconsistencies, a life which brings him the pleasures of war in peace? I was nearly asleep when, with a kick, Rastignac opened the door, and exclaimed:

"'Victory! We can die at ease now! . . .'

"He showed me his hat full of gold and placed it on the table. We danced around the room like two cannibals about to eat a prey, howling, stamping and leaping, happy with the thought of all the pleasures contained in that hat.

"'Twenty-seven thousand francs,' Rastignac said, adding some bank notes to the pile of gold. 'This money is enough to live on, but is it enough to die on? Oh yes! . . . we can expire in a bath of gold! . . . Hurrah!'

"And we capered around the room again. We shared out the money, coin by coin, starting with the double Napoleons, and going from the large coins to the small, enjoying ourselves by saying: 'For you . . . for me . . .'

"'We can't go to sleep now,' said Rastignac, 'Joseph, some punch!'

"He threw his faithful servant some gold.

"There's your share,' he said.

"The next day I bought some furniture from Lesage, rented the apartment on Taithout Road, where you met me, and commissioned the best upholsterer to decorate it. I even bought some horses. I then threw myself suddenly into a whirlwind of real and empty pleasures. I gambled, won and lost enormous sums, but only at balls and in the homes of friends, never in gambling houses, for which I retained my healthy and primitive horror. Naturally, I made friends. I owe their attachment to that confident facility with which we confided our secrets to each other, but more perhaps to the fact that we shared common vices. I wrote some literary compositions for which I was complimented. The great critics, not seeing in me a rival to fear, praised me not for any personal merit, but merely to annoy their comrades. I became a free liver. I was always fresh and elegant and passed for an intellectual. Soon debauchery appeared to me in all the majesty of its horror and I realised it. Wise and steady men cannot imagine what a full or a normal life means. And even in Paris, the intellectual capital of the world, don't you meet incomplete sybarites? Incapable of enduring the excesses of pleasure, don't they go home tired after an orgy, like those good bourgeois who, after having heard one of Rossini's new opéras, condemn the music? Don't they denounce debauchery like the sober man who won't eat pies because the first gave him indigestion? Debauchery is an art like poetry, and needs strong minds. To understand its mysteries and to savour its beauties a man must make a conscientious study of it. Like all sciences it is at the beginning repugnant and intricate. Immense obstacles surround man's greatest pleasures, not any specific joys, but those experiences which usually rouse and give birth to the rarest sensation, creating in his life something dramatic and causing an exhausting and sudden dissipation of his strength. War, power and art are corruptions so distant from human reach and so deep like debauchery, that all are difficult of access. But when a man

has stormed those mysteries doesn't he walk in a new world? Generals, ministers and artists are all more or less carried towards dissolution by the need to fight the violent distractions of their lives. After all, war is only the debauchery of blood, as politics is of interests. Those social monstrosities are like an abyss; they draw us towards them as St. Helena attracted Napoleon. They make us dizzy, but their fascination is so overwhelming that we want to get to the bottom without knowing the reason. The conception of infinity, perhaps, lies in those precipices or may be they hide some flattering tribute to man. In contrast with the paradise of his studious hours, the artist demands either, like God rest on Sunday, or like the devil the voluptuousness of hell. In war doesn't man become a destroying angel, a sort of gigantic executioner? Hasn't Europe been intermittently soaked in the blood of ceaseless wars? Don't men in the mass, then, enjoy a sort of drunkenness? For a man like Mirabeau who vegetates under a peaceful reign and dreams of wars, debauchery is the only outlet, because it embraces the whole of life or, better, it is a perpetual duel with an unknown force, a monster. The monster at first frightens one. It must be attacked by the horns. Nature has given us a narrow and lazy stomach. It must be mastered, stretched, taught to carry wine until finally the man has succeeded in achieving the temperament of a Colonel. God! when a man has thus changed himself, when he has become an old soldier, when the neophyte has fashioned his soul to the artillery and his legs to the march, he does not belong to the monster, but is engaged in a continual fight, in a sphere where everything is marvellous, and from which he sometimes emerges the victor and sometimes the vanquished. Debauchery is no doubt to the body what mystic pleasures are to the soul. Drunkenness plunges one into dreams whose phantasmagorias can be as curious as those of ecstasy. It brings you ravishing hours, delicious talks with friends which cover the whole of life with no mental reservations, and voyages which never tire you out.

^ The brutal satisfaction of the beast at the bottom of which

science has been searching for a soul, is followed by enchanting torpors after which men, weary of their minds, sigh. Don't they all feel the need for complete rest, and isn't debauchery a sort of tax which the genius pays to evil? Take all the great men of the world for instance. If they were not voluptuous, nature made them worthless. A power vitiates their soul or body in order to neutralise the efforts of their talents. During those hours of drunkenness men and things appear clothed in your own livery. You become king of the whole of creation and transform it to your own desires. But one day you violently awaken to the fact that you belong to the monster, that it is seated on your head. As for me, perhaps some pulmonary disease shall seize me and take my life away. That's how I've been living! I've either been born too early or too late, but it was necessary that whatever strength I possessed should be deadened. To people with uncertain destinies either heaven or hell is indispensable, either debauchery or the refuge of Mont Saint-Bernard. A little while ago I hadn't the courage to moralise on those two women," he said, indicating Aquilina and Euphrasia. "Aren't they the personification of my history? In the middle of the staggering life I had led I experienced two crises which brought me the sharpest sorrows. Some days after I entered my new life I met Feodora at the entrance of a theatre. We were waiting for our carriages.

"'Ah! you're still alive!'

"That was my translation of the malicious smile on her face. Oh! to want to die for her, to adore her still, to still see her in my drunken moods, in the beds of courtesans and feel myself the victim of a joke! I felt like tearing open my breast, rummaging in it for my love, and throwing it at her feet. The other was that I eventually exhausted my fortune. But three years of hard living had made me robust so that when I found myself without money I was in splendid health. I was forced to sign some letters of exchange. What cruel emotions I experienced! The first debt I incurred revived all my virtues, but I knew how to

compromise with them as with those old aunts who commence by snarling at us and end by shedding tears and giving us money. But my imagination was more severe and revealed how my name would travel from town to town all over Europe. 'Our names are ourselves', Eusèbe Salverte once said. Whereas at one time I was hardly aware of them, now the sight of a bank employee, in his grey uniform and gold badge, made me shiver with fear. Wouldn't one of them come to me one morning for the letters of exchange I had scribbled? Bailiffs, hard and indifferent men, appeared before me like hangmen. Their clerks could get hold of me at any moment, they could scribble my name, soil it, and make fun of it. I was a debtor! Wouldn't other men want me to render an account of my life? Why did I eat expensive puddings? Why did I drink iced water? Why did I enjoy so many things without paying for them? In the middle of a poem or a thought, or surrounded by happy friends at breakfast, I might suddenly see a man in a red coat and holding a shabby hat enter. He would be my debt, my letter of exchange, a spectre which would destroy my happiness and my gaiety. Remorse is more tolerable. It does not put us on the street or in St. Pélagie, it does not plunge us in that execrable sink of vice, it only throws us to the gallows. How horrible it is to have to meet those people at the corner of a street, those horrible people who have the privilege of saying: 'Monsieur de Valentine owes me money but won't pay up!' I have to greet my creditors, and that gracefully. 'When are you going to pay me?' they ask. We are then obliged to lie, to beg another man for the money, to bend and scrape before some fool seated before a cash-box, to receive his cold and extortionate look which is more odious than an insult, and to endure his stupid morality and crass ignorance. They don't seem to realise that a debt is an imaginative piece of work. Before a bill falls due I enjoyed that false calm which people experience before their execution or a duel. But when I awoke I felt my soul imprisoned in the portfolio of a banker, written in his register in red ink and my debts seemed to

burst out everywhere like grasshoppers. They were on my clock, on my sofa-chairs and encrusted in every other piece of furniture which sooner or later would be brutally carried away by the bailiff's men. Ah! I used to suffer martyrdom. When the bell of my apartment was rung it seemed to echo in my very heart! Yes, to a generous man a debt is hell, a hell peopled with bailiffs and clerks. An unpaid debt is a sordid thing, the beginning of cheating and, worse than that, it is a falsehood! It gives rise to crimes which slowly gather the planks for the scaffold. My letters of exchange were protested and three days later I paid them. This is how it happened. A speculator proposed that I sell the island I possessed in the Loire, on which my mother's tomb was. When I was signing the contract in the notary's study, a chilly feeling suddenly seized me. I shivered because I recognised in it the same feeling that overtook me when I stood on the edge of my father's grave. I seemed to hear my mother's voice and to see her ghost, and I vaguely heard my own name pronounced in the middle of a medley of clicking clocks! After all my debts had been paid I was left with two thousand francs. Of course I could have returned to the peaceful life of a savant, I could have returned to my garret after having experimented with life, with my mind full of observations and already enjoying a sort of reputation. But Feodora's grip on me had not slackened. I often met her face to face. I could hear her whisper my name to her attendants and she seemed astonished at my success. But she was still as cold and unfeeling as ever. I filled the whole world with my vengeance, but I wasn't happy! Although I dragged my life into the mire I still hankered after love, I pursued it like a phantom across the delights of my debauchery, in the midst of my orgies. But I was deceived. I was punished for my tenderness by ingratitude, and rewarded for my faults by a thousand pleasures. A sinister philosophy, but true enough for a debauchee! Finally, I had caught Feodora's leprous vanity. When I probed my soul I found it rotten, gangrenous. The devil had stamped its ergot on my for-

head. I could not bear the thought of being alone. I wanted to be surrounded by courtesans, false friends and wine. The ties which attached a man to his family were broken forever in me. I gradually progressed towards the accomplishment of my destiny—suicide. I enjoyed the most incredible excesses at night but, in the morning, death once again gave me back my life. Eventually I found myself alone with a twenty-franc coin. I remembered Rastignac. . . .

"Ah! Ah! . . ." Raphael exclaimed suddenly thinking of his talisman. He drew it out from his pocket.

Either that, fatigued by the struggles he had been through during the day he no longer had any control over his mind, which was now under the influence of wine and punch, or, exasperated by the thought of his own life and unknowingly intoxicated by the torrent of his own words, Raphael suddenly awoke like a man exalted and completely deprived of reason.

"To the devil with death!" he said waving the skin. "I want to live now! I'm rich, I have everything. Nothing can stand in my way . . . Ha! ha! ha! . . . If I want two thousand pounds I can have them. Salute me you dogs who sprawl on those carpets as on a dunghill! All of you belong to me. I'm rich, I can buy everything from you, even the deputy who's snoring there. Let me bless you, you scum of high society, I'm the Pope!"

At first Raphael's words were drowned by the snoring. But suddenly the majority of the sleepers awoke. They walked up to him and, standing unsteadily on their feet, cursed his noisy drunkenness with a concord of oaths.

". . . Quiet!" exclaimed Raphael. "Get back to your kennels, you dogs! . . . Emile, I have money now, I'll give you some Havana cigars."

"I heard you," replied the poet. "Teodora or death! Go ahead! She has deceived you! All women are the daughters of Eve. Your story is not as dramatic as you think."

• "Ah! you were asleep, you rascal!"

"No . . . Feodora or death! I heard it."

"Get up," said Raphael, slapping Emile with the shagreen skin.

"Hell!" exclaimed Emile rising and seizing Raphael by the arms.

"I'm a millionaire!"

"If you're not a millionaire you're certainly drunk."

"Drunk with power. I can have you killed! . . . Silence, I'm Nero, I'm Nebuchadnezzar!"

"But Raphael, you must be quiet, at least for the sake of dignity."

"I've been silent too long. I want to avenge myself on the whole world. I won't amuse myself merely by spending some vile crowns. I want to complete my life. I'll fight every kind of fever, yellow, blue, green, even the scaffold. I can have Feodora . . . but, no, I don't want Feodora, she's the malady I suffer from, I shall die of Feodora! I want to forget her."

"If you continue to shout I'll have to take you into the dining room."

"Do you see this skin. It is the testament of Solomon. He belongs to me now, that puny fool of a king! The universe belongs to me. You belong to me, if I want you. Ah! if I want . . . be careful! You shall be my valet, you'll compose couplets for me and run my paper . . . Valet, valet!"

Emile dragged Raphael into the drawing room.

"Yes, yes, Raphael," he said, "I'm your valet. But you're going to be the editor-in-chief of a newspaper . . . please keep silent . . . at least out of consideration for me! Do you like me?"

"Do I like you! You shall have Havana cigars if I have this skin. Have you got corns? I'll take them off for you."

"I've never known you to act so stupid."

"Stupid? No, of course not. This skin contracts every time I make a wish . . . it is an antiphrasis. The Brahmin . . . was a scoffer . . . because . . ."

"Yes, yes . . ."

"I said . . ."

"Yes that's quite true, I think so too . . ."

"I said the skin!"

"Yes."

"You don't believe me. I know you . . ."

"What am I to make of the divagations of your drunkenness?"

"I bet you I can prove it to you. Let's measure it . . ."

"He won't go to sleep," said Emile watching Raphael rummaging about the room.

Valentine, with ape-like dexterity, thanks to that singular lucidity which sometimes accompanies drunkenness, was able to ferret out a serviette, always repeating to himself the words: "Let's measure it, let's measure it!"

"Of course," said Emile, "let's measure it!"

The two friends stretched out the serviette and placed the shagreen skin on it. Emile, whose hand seemed steadier, drew a line along the edges of the talisman while his friend said:

"I wanted two thousand pounds, didn't I? Well, when I get it you'll see . . ."

"Yes, yes . . . now go to sleep. Shall I put you on that couch? Are you all right?"

"Yes, my foster-child, but why are you in such a hurry? Yes, I shall make you my companion . . . the friend of riches and power. And I'll give you . . . some . . . Havana . . . cigars."

"Come, sleep off the effects of your gold, millionaire."

"And you . . . you sleep off the effects of your articles. Good night . . . Say good night to Nebuchadnezzar! . . . Love . . . Drink . . . France . . . glory and riches . . . riches! . . ."

Soon the two friends were snoring in unison with the music which still echoed in the salons. One by one the candles were extinguished and, like a veil, night enveloped that long debauch in which Raphael's outburst had been like an orgy of words, inchoate and expressionless words.

The next day, towards midday, the beautiful Aquilina awoke tired and yawning. Euphrasia, disturbed by her companion, suddenly sat up uttering a raucous cry. Her pretty face, which had been so white and fresh the previous evening, was now pale and yellow like that of a sick woman. Gradually, the guests began to stir accompanied by the most sinister groans. They felt their arms and legs stiff, and a thousand diverse forms of weariness overwhelmed them. A valet entered and opened the shutters and windows. The assembly found itself on its feet, recalled to life by the warm rays of the sun. Their movements during sleep having destroyed the elegant edifices of their coiffures and generally tarnished their appearance, the women presented a hideous sight. Their hair hung in strands, the expression on their faces had changed, their eyes, which had been so brilliant and clear, were dulled by lassitude and their beautiful red lips had become dry and white. When the men saw their nocturnal mistresses wan and discoloured, like flowers crushed on a road after a procession had passed, they disowned them. But those scornful men were still more horrible to look at. You would have shivered to see their horrible faces with their hollow and encircled eyes. There was a cold and ferocious bestiality about them all. Both the men and women remained silent while they examined with haggard eyes the disorder of the apartment, where everything had been devastated, ravaged by the fire of their own passions. Suddenly an almost satanic laughter echoed through the rooms when Taillefer, after staring for a moment at his dumb guests, tried to greet them. With his red face perspiring, he tried to restore some semblance of order to that infernal scene, which was a horrible mixture of human pomp and misery. He looked like death smiling in the midst of a plague-stricken family. In spite of being accustomed to a life of vice, many of the young women dreamt of their former awakenings when, innocent and pure, they caught a glimpse of their sylvan surroundings, a fresh landscape ornamented with honeysuckle and roses, enchanted by the joyous trills of the lark, vaporously

illuminated by the early gleams of the dawn and embellished by the fantasies of the dew. Others thought of the family breakfast, around the table of which laughed the father and children, where everything exhaled an indefinable charm and was as simple as their own hearts. An artist dreamed of his peaceful studio, his chaste statue and the graceful model who worked for him. A young man, recollecting the lawsuit on which the fate of his family depended, thought of the important transactions which demanded his attention, while the savant yearned for his study and the noble work called him. And nearly all of them pitied themselves. At this moment Emile, fresh and ruddy, appeared on the scene, smiling.

"Why, you look uglier than bailiffs!" he exclaimed. "Nothing can be done now, the day is almost over. I suggest we have breakfast!"

With these words Taillefer went out to give orders. The women wandered languishingly towards the glasses to set right their disordered toilets. Some of the courtesans made fun of those who found they had not the strength to continue the vulgar feast. In a moment all of them came to life, formed themselves into groups and smiled and talked. Clever and nimble valets promptly replaced the furniture and everything else in its place. A splendid breakfast was served, and the guests hurled themselves into the dining room, where, if everything wore the ineffacable imprint of the excesses of the previous evening, at least there was a trace of life and movement.

When the assembly was seated around the capitalist's table, Cardot, who, the previous evening, had prudently disappeared after dinner to complete his orgy at home, showed his officious face wreathed in a sickly smile. He saw within his grasp a succession in which to share, to catalogue and engross, a succession fat with fees and as juicy as the fowl into which the trembling hand of the host was plunging a knife.

"Ah! we were going to have breakfast without the notary!" said Cursy.

"You're just in time to price and initial all these things," said the banker indicating the table.

"There's no will to draw up, but there may be some marriage contracts!" said the savant.

"Oh! Oh!"

"Ah! Ah!"

"Just a minute," replied Cardot, stunned by the chorus of vulgar jokes. "I've come here on serious business. I bring six millions for one of you (profound silence)—Monsieur," he said addressing Raphael, who at that moment was busy unceremoniously wiping his eyes with the corner of his serviette, "wasn't your mother's name O'Flaharty?"

"Yes," replied Raphael indifferently.

"Well, sir, you're the sole inheritor of Major O'Flaharty, who died in August 1828 at Calcutta."

"What a fortune!" exclaimed the judge.

"The Major having disposed in his will of several sums in favour of some public institutions, his succession has been claimed from the Indian Company by the French Government," continued the notary. "For 15 years I have been searching in vain for the relatives of Barbe-Marie O'Flaharty, when suddenly last night at table..."

At this moment Raphael rose suddenly with the quick movement of a man who has been wounded. The first feeling that passed through the guests was a secret envy, all eyes turned towards him like so many flames. Then a murmur arose, grew, and each paid tribute to the immense fortune which the notary had brought. Raphael seemed to suddenly lose all his reason and stretched out on the table the serviette on which he had, a short while ago, measured the shagreen skin. Deaf to everything around him, he placed the talisman on it and shivered involuntarily when he saw a small distance between the line he had traced and the skin.

"Hold him up, you fool!" Bixion said to Emile. "He looks as if he may faint!"

Raphael's withered face turned horribly pale, his features contracted and the hollows became dark. He

stared at the talisman which fitted so easily into the lines traced on the serviette. He tried to doubt what he saw, but a clear foreboding crushed his incredulity. The world belonged to him, he had everything and could wish for nothing more, but, like a traveller in the middle of the desert, he had only a little water to allay his thirst and his life would have to be measured by the number of sips he took. He saw that each desire would cost him some days of his life.

"Oh! Raphael, you can enjoy yourself now!" said Aquilina. "What are you going to give me?"

"Let's drink to the death of his uncle, Major O'Flaharty!"

"He'll become a Peer of France."

"Bah! What's a Peer after July!" said the judge.

"Will you have a box at the theatre?"

"I hope you'll think of entertaining us sometimes," said Bixion.

"He knows how to do things," said Emilc.

These sentences echoed in Valentine's ears without him being able to understand a single word. He was thinking vaguely of the mechanical and self-satisfied life of a British peasant who tilled his field, ate buckwheat, drank cider, believed in the Virgin and the King, took communion at Easter, danced on Sunday on a green lawn and never understood his rector's sermon. But suddenly the scene before him, the courtesans, the breakfast, the luxury seemed to catch him at the throat and he began to cough.

"Do you want some asparagus?" the banker asked him.

"I want nothing!" Raphael replied in a thundering voice.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Taillefer. "That's the spirit! You're a real millionaire!—Gentlemen, let's drink to the power of gold. Valentine is now a king, he can do almost anything, and he's above everything. In future, as far as he is concerned, that all French men are equal before the law is a lie. He won't obey the laws, the laws shall obey him. There are no scaffolds and no executioners for millionaires!"

"That's true," replied Raphael, "they are their own executioners!"

"A mere prejudice!" exclaimed the banker.

"Let's drink!" said Raphael, putting the talisman into his pocket.

"What are you doing?" said Emile holding Raphael's hand. "Gentlemen," he said, addressing the assembly, "you are familiar with Raphael, but do you know the Marquis of Valentine possesses a secret way of making a fortune. His wishes are accomplished the moment he makes them. He's going to make us all rich!"

"Oh! Raphael," said Euphrasia, "I want a string of pearls."

"I want two carriages drawn by fast horses!" said Aquilina.

"Give me a hundred thousand pounds a year!"

"I want some silks!"

"Pay my debts!"

"Let my uncle die of apoplexy!"

"Only ten thousand pounds a year, Raphael!"

"Cure me of my gout!"

"Let the shares fall!" said the banker.

"My dear friend," said Emile gravely. "I shall be more than satisfied with two hundred thousand pounds a year."

"Do you know the price I shall have to pay?" said Raphael.

"A fine excuse!" replied Emile. "Aren't we expected to make sacrifices for our friends?"

"I almost wish all of you would die," said Raphael looking around at the guests.

"The dying are always cruel," said Emile laughing. "You are rich now and, in less than two months, you'll become frightfully egoistic. You've already become stupid, you don't understand a joke... why, you'll soon be believing in your shagreen skin!..."

Raphael, who was afraid of being mocked at by that assembly, kept silent and drank heavily in order to forget for a moment his fatal power.

CHAPTER III

THE AGONY

EARLY in December, in spite of the rain, an old man walked along the Varenne Road, raising his nose at the door of every house, looking for the mansion of the Marquis of Valentine with the naïveté of a child and the absorbed air of a philosopher. Violent grief was written on his face, which was withered like a piece of parchment that has been held near the fire, and his long grey hair fell in disorder around his shoulders. If some painter had met this singular person, who was thin and bony and dressed in black, he would no doubt, when he returned to his studio, have painted a portrait of him and written under it: CLASSICAL POET IN QUEST OF A RHYME. After having verified the number which had been given him, he knocked gently on the door of a magnificent mansion.

"Is Monsieur Raphael in?" he asked the footman.

"The Marquis receives nobody," replied the valet.

"But his carriage is here," replied the old man. "He's going out. I'll wait for him."

"My dear man, you can stay here till tomorrow morning," replied the valet. "There's always a carriage waiting for him. But go, I beg of you, I'll lose six hundred francs for life if I once allowed a stranger to enter the house. . . ."

At this moment a tall old man, dressed like a bailiff, emerged from the vestibule and, after descending a few steps, stood examining the stranger with astonishment.

"Ah! here's Mr. Jonathas," said the valet. "Talk to him."

The two old men, attracted to each other by mutual sympathy or curiosity, stared at each other. An oppressive silence reigned in the courtyard. On seeing Jonathas you would have wanted to penetrate the mystery which hovered

about his face and which revealed nothing of the gloom which surrounded that house. The first thing Raphael did on receiving his uncle's immense fortune was to discover where his old servant, on whose affection he could rely, lived. Jonathas cried with joy when he saw his young master again, to whom he thought he had said goodbye forever. But nothing made him happier than when the Marquis made him his steward. Old Jonathas became a powerful intermediary placed between Raphael and the entire world. The supreme manager of his master's fortune and the blind executor of an unknown idea, he was like a sixth sense across which life's emotions reached Raphael.

"I want to speak to Raphael," said the old man climbing a few steps to shelter himself from the rain.

"To speak to the Marquis?..." exclaimed the steward.

"He has hardly spoken a word to me... to me his foster-father!"

"But I'm his foster-father too!" replied the old man.

"If your wife suckled him at one time, I've made him suckle at the breast of the Muses. He's my foster-child, my baby, *carus alumnus!* I've moulded his mind, cultivated his understanding and developed his genius... and I'll go so far as to say to my honour and glory. Isn't he one of the most remarkable men of our age? I've had him under me, I'm his professor."

"Ah! you're Monsieur Porriquet?"

"Precisely. But..."

"Ssh! Ssh!" said Jonathas to two kitchen-maids whose voices broke the monastic silence in which the house was shrouded.

"Is the Marquis ill?" asked the professor.

"My dear sir," replied Jonathas, "God only knows what's the matter with my master. Do you know there aren't two houses like ours in Paris? Do you hear? There aren't two houses. My word, no! The Marquis bought this mansion from a Duke. He's spent three hundred million francs to furnish it. That's a sum that, three

hundred million francs! Each part of the house is a real miracle. Good! I said to myself when I saw such magnificence, it's just like his grandfather's home. The young Marquis will want to entertain! But, no, he wants to see nobody. He leads a peculiar life, Monsieur Porriquet, do you hear? a very peculiar life. He wakes every day at the same time. Only I . . . I alone enter his room. I open the windows at 7 o'clock, summer or winter. That you must admit is peculiar. And then I say to him: 'Monsieur le Marquis, you must get up and dress yourself.' I give him his dressing gown, which is always made in the same way and of the same material. I have to replace it when it is torn . . . nothing pains him more than to have to ask for a new one. And he has a thousand francs to spend every day, the dear child! But I love him so much that, should he strike me on the right cheek, I would turn the left to him! And even though he may ask me to do the most difficult things I should still do them, do you hear? He has given me so many things to do that I'm kept quite busy all day. I shave him every day at the same time and have to place the papers on the same table at the same time every day. The cook would lose thousand francs for life if the breakfast were not served at 10 o'clock each morning and dinner at precisely 5 o'clock. The menu has been drawn up for the whole year, day by day. There's nothing which the Marquis does not have. He eats strawberries when there are strawberries, and the first mackerel which reaches Paris. The menu has been printed, he knows in the morning what he's going to have at night. And, therefore, he dresses at the same time in the same clothes, which are always placed by me on the same sofa. If his frock-coat has been worn out it must be replaced by another without his knowing it.

"If the weather is fine I ask him: 'Do you want to go out, sir?' He answers either 'yes' or 'no'. If he doesn't want to walk, he does not have to wait for his horses to be harnessed. The coachman is always ready, whip in hand, as you see. After dinner he goes one day to the opera and

the next to the Italians . . . no, no, he hasn't been to the Italians yet, only yesterday I was able to hire a box for him. And he returns precisely at 11 o'clock to sleep. During the day, when he's doing nothing in particular, he reads. I have orders to read out to him the list of new books, which are to be found on his mantelpiece the very day they are published. I've been instructed to visit him hour by hour, to watch the fire and see that he needs nothing. He's given me a small book, in which all my duties have been written down, to learn by heart . . . a real catechism! In summer, I must, with piles of ice, maintain the temperature at the same degree of freshness and fill the rooms at all times with fresh flowers. Well, he's rich! He has thousand francs a day to spend and can satisfy his whims and fancies. He has been deprived of them for such a long time, the poor child! He never worries anyone, he's good, never says a word and, by example, complete silence reigns in the house and the garden! If one does not control servants there'll be confusion. My master is quite right. I tell him everything he must do and he listens to me. You wouldn't believe to what limit he's taken the whole thing. His rooms are . . . well, supposing he opens the door of his room or study . . . crack! . . . every door opens by itself mechanically. He wants to walk from one end of his home to the other without having to open a single door. It's convenient for us all! Well, Monsieur Porriquet, he said to me: 'Jonathas, you must look after me like a child in arms.' A child in arms, sir, a child in arms, he said! I'm the master, you know? He's almost a servant! Why? Ah! that's what nobody in the world knows . . . it's between him and God. He's peculiar!"

"It sounds like a poem," said the old professor.

"You think so, sir? A very restrictive one surely! I don't think so. He often tells me he'd like to be a brush! And only yesterday, looking at a tulip, he said: 'There's my life, Jonathas . . . I vegetate!' It's very peculiar!"

"Everything, Jonathas, proves," replied the old professor with magisterial gravity that had a profound impression on

the old servant, "that your master is busy on some great work. He is plunged in profound meditation and does not want to be distracted by the preoccupations of vulgar, everyday life. In the middle of his work a man of genius forgets everything. One day, the famous Newton..."

"Ah! Newton..." said Jonathas. "I don't know him."

"Newton, a great geometrician," continued Porriquet. "once spent 21 hours with his elbows on his table. When he came out of his reverie, he thought the next day was still the previous one... I want to see him, the poor child, I might be of use to him."

"Just a moment!" exclaimed Jonathas. "You may be the king of France but you can't enter, at least, not unless you force the door and walk over my body. But Monsieur Porriquet I'll tell him you're here, and ask him: 'Is it necessary to make him climb up here?' He'll reply 'yes' or 'no'. I'm never permitted to use the words wish, want or desire. Once I said: 'Do you want me to die?' and he was very angry."

Jonathas left the old professor in the vestibule telling him not to advance any farther. But he returned almost immediately with a favourable reply and conducted the old man through some sumptuous rooms all the doors of which were open. Porriquet saw his old pupil near a corner of the fireplace. Enveloped in a dressing gown and plunged in a sofa-chair, Raphael was reading the newspaper. The extreme melancholy to which he seemed a prey was revealed in the sickly attitude of his bent body; it was painted on his face, which was as pale as an etiolated flower. A sort of effeminate grace and the singular peculiarities of rich but ill people distinguished his person. His blond hair, which had now become thin, curled about his temples with affected coquetry, and a Greek skull-cap, with a tassel which was too heavy for the light Cashmere of which it was made, balanced on one side of his head. At his feet lay a malachite knife, embellished with gold, which he used to cut the leaves of a book and, on his knees was the amber

spout of a magnificent Indian hooka whose spiral lay outstretched on the floor like a serpent. But the general feebleness of his young body was contradicted by his bright blue eyes where all life centred, and which shone with extraordinary understanding. It made one almost sick to see. Some would have read despair in them, while others an internal struggle as terrible as sorrow itself. They were a profound revelation of his powerlessness to drive his desires back to the bottom of his heart. He seemed to resemble a miser who, while playing with the thought of all the pleasures his money could buy him, at the same time rejected them in order not to deplete his fortune. There was the same look in his eyes as that of Prometheus bound or of Napoleon when he was defeated in 1815. It was the look of the conqueror and the damned! He had subordinated his will and his mind to the boorish common sense of an old, half-civilised peasant accustomed to more than fifty years of domesticity. He had become a sort of automaton, and lived merely to strip his soul of all the poetry of desire. In order to be better able to fight the cruel power, whose challenge he had accepted, he had made himself as chaste as Origène by gelding his imagination. The day after he had heard the news of the fortune which had been left him he dined at the notary's. There he met a doctor who, at dessert, related how a Swiss had cured himself of consumption. He did not utter a word for six years, breathed only six times every minute and followed a very simple diet. 'I'll be that man!' Raphael had said to himself, because he wanted to live at any cost. In the midst of luxury he led the life of a machine. When the professor faced the young corpse of a man, he shuddered. Everything in his feeble and slender body seemed artificial. Looking at the Marquis with his wasting eye and thoughtful forehead, he could not recognise the fresh and ruddy pupil he had known. If the classical, good natured old man had read Byron he might have felt he was meeting Manfred when he wanted to see Childe Harold.

"Good morning, Monsieur Porriquet," said Raphael.

pressing the old professor's cold hand in a warm and moist grasp. "How are you?"

"Oh! I'm well," replied the old man a little frightened. "And you?"

"Well, thank you."

"I suppose you're working on a book?"

"No," replied Raphael. "*Exegi monumentum*, Monsieur Porriquet. I've finished with all that. I don't even know where my manuscript is."

"It's in the pure style, I hope?" said the professor. "You haven't adopted the barbarous style of the new school which thinks it marvellous to imitate Ronsard?"

"My book is a purely physiological one."

"That doesn't matter," replied the professor. "Language is important in a scientific treatise. A clear and harmonious style, the language of Massillon, Buffon or Racine, a truly classical style never mars anything . . . But, my dear child, I've forgotten all about the object of my visit. It's an interesting one."

When Raphael heard the verbose elegance and eloquent principles to which a long professorship had accustomed his former master, he nearly repented having received him. But, when he was about to wish he were outside, he promptly suppressed his secret desire and glanced furtively at the shagreen skin. Fastened on a white cloth it was suspended before him on a chair where its fatidic outline was carefully sketched by a red line. Since the night of that fatal orgy, Raphael smothered his smallest desires so as not to cause the slightest shrinkage in the talisman. The shagreen skin was like a tiger with which he had to live and not awaken its ferocity.

He listened patiently to the amplifications of the old professor. Mons. Porriquet took almost an hour to describe the persecutions to which he had been subjected since the July Revolution. He spoke in support of a strong government, but said that grocers should be left behind their counters, statesmen should manage public affairs, lawyers should be in the Palais and the Peers of France in the

Luxembourg. But one of the popular ministries had dismissed him from his chair and accused him of Carlism. The old man was, therefore, without a post and hungry. Having a poor nephew whose college fees he had to pay, he had come, not for himself, but for the sake of his adopted child, to beg his old pupil to persuade the new ministry, not to restore him to his post, but to find him employment in some provincial college. Long before the monotonous voice of the good old man had ceased to echo through the room, Raphael had become the prey of an invincible somnolence. He had been obliged, out of politeness, to stare at the professor's white and immobile eyes and had been stupefied and magnetised into an inexplicable inertia.

"Well, my dear Monsieur Porriquet," he said without knowing exactly what the old man wanted, "I can do nothing about it. I wish most earnestly that..."

Without noticing the effect that his banal words produced on the yellow and wrinkled forehead of the old man, Raphael adopted the attitude of a frightened young deer. He saw a white space between the edge of the black skin and the red line, and uttered such a horrible cry that the old professor was startled.

"Get out, you old beast!" he said. "You'll get your post! Couldn't you have asked for a thousand crowns for life instead of that homicidal wish? Your visit then would have cost me nothing. There are a hundred thousand jobs in France, but I have only one life! And life is preferable to all the jobs in the world... Jonathas!"

Jonathas appeared.

"Is this the way you look after me, you fool? Why did you suggest I receive this man?" he asked, pointing to the professor. "Have I placed my soul in your hands to destroy it? You've now deprived me of ten years of my life! If you commit another fault like this you'll send me where my father is! Don't you think I'd have preferred to have the beautiful Feodora than to oblige this old carcass, this human rag? I could have given him money... but

what has it got to do with me if all the Porriquets in the world are dying of hunger?"

Raphael's face had become white with anger and a light white foam stood on his trembling lips. When the two old men saw him they were seized by a convulsive trembling, like two children in the presence of a serpent. The young man fell into his chair. A sort of reaction set in and tears began to flow from his eyes.

"Oh, my life! . . . my beautiful life!" he exclaimed. "More charity! More love! More loss!"

He turned towards the professor.

"The evil is done, my dear friend," he said in a quiet voice. "You have been rewarded for your work and, at the expense of my life, the well-being of a good and worthy man has been assured."

There was so much tender solicitude in these words, which were almost indistinguishable, that the two old men cried as one cries on hearing a touching tune sung in a strange language.

"He's epileptic!" said Porriquet in a low voice.

"I know you're a good man," said Raphael. "You must excuse me. If sickness is an accident, inhumanity would be a vice. Leave me now. You'll probably receive your nomination tomorrow, or even this evening... Goodbye."

The old man retired, filled with horror and uneasiness at Valentine's mental state. There seemed to him to have been something unnatural about the scene he had just gone through. He began to doubt and questioned himself as if he had awakened from a peaceful dream.

"—Listen, Jonathas," said the young man addressing his old servant. "You must try to understand the task I've entrusted you with!"

"Yes, sir."

"—I'm like a man placed outside the common law."

"Yes, sir."

"All the pleasure in the world can only dance around me like beautiful women. If I want them, I die. It's

always death! You must be a barrier between the world and I."

"Yes, sir," said the old valet wiping the drops of perspiration which stood on his wrinkled forehead. "But if you don't want to see beautiful women, why don't you go this evening to the Italians? An English family, which has returned to London, gave me a season ticket and you have such a beautiful box... oh! a superb box!"

Raphael who had fallen into a profound reverie, scarcely heard what the old servant said.

Do you see that ostentatious carriage, that brown coloured coupé, so simple outside but on the panels of which shine the escutcheon of an old and noble family? As it passes rapidly along the roads, the working girls admire it, covet the yellow satin, the lush carpet, the fresh white lace and the soft cushions. Two liveried lackeys stand behind the carriage, but in its depths, on the silk, lies a burning head with eyes with dark circles around them—the head of Raphael, dark and pensive. What a picture of a rich man! He was taken across Paris like a rocket and brought to the peristyle of the Favert Theatre, where the step was unfolded and his two valets supported him out. An envious crowd looked on.

"What's the use of being so rich?" said a poor student who, because he hadn't a crown, could not hear the magical music of Rossini.

Raphael walked slowly into the corridor of the hall. He no longer looked forward to the pleasures which he had at one time envied. While waiting for the second act of *Semiramide*, he strolled about in the foyer and wandered along the galleries, indifferent about his box which he had not even entered as yet. The proud feeling of ownership no longer existed in his heart. Like all sick people, he only thought of his malady. Leaning against the mantel-piece in the foyer, where young and old men, women of fashion, old and new ministers, peers without peerages and peerages without peers (such were the changes the July Revolution brought) had gathered, Raphael suddenly saw.

a few feet away from him, a strange and supernatural face. The eyebrows and the hair were black, and the face, because of the cosmetics which had been used, changed with the reflections of the light. It was impossible not to laugh at this head with its pointed chin and prominent forehead, resembling those grotesque faces sculptured in Germany by shepherds in their leisure. If an observer examined in turn the old Adonis and Raphael, he would have seen in the Marquis the eyes of a youth under the mask of an old man and, in the stranger the dim eyes of an old man under the mask of a youth. Valentine tried to recall under what circumstances he had seen that well-dressed, dried-up old man, who walked and threw his arms about as if he possessed all the strength of petulant youth. His gait was neither cramped nor artificial and his elegant dress hid an old but strong body and gave him the appearance of an old fop who was still a slave of fashion. The old man's figure had for Raphael all the charms of an apparition, and he contemplated him as he would an old Rembrandt which had been recently restored, varnished and placed in a new frame. That comparison suddenly made him search for the truth of his identity in his confused mind. He immediately recognised the curio merchant, the man to whom he owed his misfortune. At that moment a smile escaped from the fantastic old man, and immediately revealed to Raphael that striking resemblance with the ideal face which painters had given to the Mephistopheles of Goethe. A thousand superstitions awoke in Raphael's strong soul and led him to believe in the power of the devil and all the magic contained in the legends of the Middle Ages. He rejected with horror the fate of Faust and, like a dying man, invoked the aid of heaven, reiterating his fervent faith in God and the Virgin Mary. A sudden radiant light shone before him and he saw heaven as depicted by Michael Angelo and Sanzio d'Urbin, with clouds, an old man wearing a white beard and a beautiful woman seated in the centre of an aureole. But when his eyes wandered again into the foyer, he saw, not the Virgin

Mary, but a ravishing woman, the despicable Euphrasia, the dancer with the supple and light body. She was attired in a glittering dress covered with Oriental pearls and entered impatiently to join the impatient old man. Her face was hard and insolent, and she seemed to be there merely to reveal to the envious world the limitless riches of the old man whose fortune she was dissipating. Raphael recalled the wish he had made when he first received the talisman from the old man, and savoured all the pleasures of vengeance by contemplating the downfall of the old merchant's sublime wisdom. The centenarian turned with a funeral smile to Euphrasia, who responded with a few indifferent words of love. He offered her his emaciated arm, took two or three turns round the foyer, and seemed delighted with the passionate and possessive glances which the men threw his mistress, without hearing their scornful laughter or their biting jokes.

"From which cemetery did she unearth that corpse?" said the most elegant of them all.

Euphrasia smiled. The speaker was a young man with blond hair, bright blue eyes, a slender body and was dressed in a short frock-coat with his hat over his ear.

"How many old men," Raphael said to himself, "crown a life of probity and virtue with folly! That man's feet are already cold, and he tries to make love! . . . Well, sir," he said, stopping the merchant and winking at Euphrasia, "don't you remember any longer the severe maxims of your own philosophy?"

"Ah!" replied the merchant in a voice already broken. "I'm now as happy as a youth. I've never known life till now . . . you can find everything in life in a single hour of love."

At that moment the bell rang and the spectators left the foyer for their seats. The old man and Raphael separated. When the Marquis entered his box, he saw Feodora seated on the other side of the hall, exactly opposite him. The Countess had obviously just arrived because she was busy throwing back her scarf which was

accompanied by those small, indescribable movements which reveal the born coquette. All eyes were turned on her. A young Peer of France was with her and she asked him to give her the lorgnette that she had made him carry. From her gestures, from the way in which she looked at him, Raphael knew the tyranny to which his successor was being subjected. Fascinated no doubt as he had once been, duped, and like him, struggling with all the strength of a true love against the cold indifference of the Countess, the young man must have been suffering the torments which Raphael had happily escaped. An inexpressible joy animated Feodora's face when, after having levelled her lorgnette on all the boxes and rapidly examined the toilets of the women, she became conscious of the superiority of her beauty and finery over the prettiest and most elegant women in Paris. She laughed to reveal her white teeth, shook her head to attract the admiration of the crowd and her eyes travelled from box to box, making fun of the beret which had been awkwardly placed on the head of a Russian princess or the hat worn by a banker's daughter. But when she met Raphael's fixed eyes she suddenly turned pale. Her former lover, whom she had scorned, crushed her by a single contemptuous glance. Of all her rejected lovers, Valentine alone had the power to make her feel uncomfortable. It affected her prestige and her coquetry. The previous evening at the Opera, a single word uttered by Raphael had become famous in all the salons of Paris. The sharpness of the epigram had wounded the Countess incurably. In France, although everyone knows how to cauterise a wound, none knows how to remedy the evil produced by a phrase. Feodora wished she were in the darkest cell of the Bastille because, in spite of her talent for dissimulation, her rivals knew she was suffering. But she had one last consolation. 'I'm the most beautiful woman,' she thought. Soon, however, she was to be deprived of even that consolation. With the opening of the second act a woman entered the box next to Raphael's which had till then remained empty. The entire audience breathed a murmur of admiration;

that sea of human faces was agitated and all eyes were turned towards the stranger. Both young and old made such a prolonged disturbance that, when the curtain was lifted, the musicians turned around to command silence, but they themselves were soon forced to join in the applause and add to the confusion. Lively conversations were started in every box, the women armed themselves with their opera glasses, and the old men, rejuvenated by the sight, cleaned their lorgnettes with their gloves. The noise, however, gradually died down, the music started and order was restored. The company, ashamed of having succumbed to a natural reaction, readopted its cold aristocratic manner. The rich did not want to be caught surprised at anything, they felt they should immediately recognise the faults in any beautiful piece of work so as to rid themselves of admiration, which they regarded as vulgar. However, some men still sat motionless, deaf to the music, lost in a naïve contemplation of Raphael's neighbour. Valentine saw in a corner box, near Aquilina, the gross red face of Taillefer, who grinned at him. Then he saw Fanié, whose face seemed to say: 'Look at the beautiful woman next to you!' And then he saw Rastignac, who, seated next to Madame Nuncigen and her daughter, twisted his gloves impatiently in his hands as if he hated being chained down and powerless to go to the divine stranger. Raphael's life was still bound by an inviolate pact he had made with himself, which was never to look at any woman closely and, in order not to be tempted, he carried a lorgnon whose glass distorted the most beautiful features. Still terrified by the events of the morning when, for a simple and polite vow, the talisman had so promptly contracted, Raphael resolved not to turn towards his neighbour. He sat like a Duchess with his back to the box and adopted the air of a man who ignored the fact that a pretty woman sat behind him. His neighbour copied Valentine's posture. With her elbow on the railing of the box and her head inclined slightly towards the stage, she looked as if she were posing for a photograph. They resembled two sulky, angry lovers, their

backs turned on each other, but ready to kiss with the first word that was spoken by either of them. Sometimes the stranger's light fan or hair touched Raphael's head which caused a voluptuous sensation through his body against which he fought courageously. Soon he felt the contact of the frills which embellished her dress and heard the soft effeminate murmur of its folds. And suddenly, like an electric shock, her whole life seemed to communicate itself to Raphael. A caprice of nature, social decorum, separated them, but a strange feeling of affinity pervaded Valentine's mind. The penetrating perfume of aloes intoxicated him and he turned around on a sudden impulse. Shocked for a moment the stranger made a similar movement.

"—Pauline!"

"—Monsieur Raphael!"

Perrified, they stared at each other for a moment Raphael saw that Pauline was simply but tastefully dressed. Under the gauze, which was drawn chastely across her bust, could be seen the lily white purity of her skin, and clever eyes could perceive the beauty of form which at least one woman had admired. There was in her whole appearance a virginal modesty, a graciousness and a celestial candour.

"Oh! come tomorrow," she said, "come to St. Quentin and take your papers. I'll be there at midday. Be punctual!"

She rose precipitately and disappeared. Raphael wanted to follow her, but fearing that he may compromise her, he remained where he was, looked at Feodora and found her ugly. But realising that he could not appreciate a single word of the music, and feeling suffocated, he returned home.

"Jonathas," he said to his old servant when he was in bed, "give me half a drop of laudanum with a piece of sugar and, tomorrow, wake me up only at 20 minutes to twelve."

"I want Pauline to love me!" he said the next day standing before the talisman and looking at it with indefinite anguish.

* There was no response from the skin, it seemed to have

lost its power of contraction: probably it was unable to fulfil a desire which had already been accomplished.

"Ah!" exclaimed Raphael, feeling as if a leaden cloak he had worn since the day he received the talisman had been removed, "you don't obey me, the pact is broken! I'm free, I'll live!"

While he said these words he hid from himself the real thought behind his mind. He dressed simply and walked to his old lodgings in an attempt to recapture those happy days when he lived in no danger of the fury of his desires and had not yet savoured all human joys. As he walked along he dreamed, not of the Pauline of Saint Quentin, but the Pauline of yesterday evening, the accomplished and intelligent woman, artistic, with a deep appreciation of poetry and living in the lap of luxury. When he found himself on the worn threshold, on the broken stone slab, where, so often, thoughts of despair had crossed his mind, an old woman came out of the hall and said:

"Aren't you Monsieur Raphael de Valentine?"

"Yes," he replied.

"You know your old room," she said, "you're awaited there."

"Does Madame Gaudin still keep these lodgings?" asked Raphael.

"Oh, no sir! Madame Gaudin is now a Baroness. She lives in a beautiful house on the other side of the river. Her husband has returned... returned with thousands... They say she can buy the whole of the St. Jacques quarter if she wants. She's given me this house. Ah! she's a good woman! She's no more prouder today than she was yesterday."

Raphael quickly climbed up to his garret and, when he reached the last few steps, he heard the piano being played. Pauline was there modestly dressed in a calico frock. But the fashion of the frock, the gloves, the hat and the shawl, which were indifferently thrown on the bed, revealed her newly acquired affluence.

"You're here!" Pauline exclaimed turning her head and rising with a naïve movement of joy.

Raphael sat down next to her, blushing, half-ashamed, but happy. He looked at her without saying a word.

"Why did you leave us?" Pauline asked lowering her eyes. "What have you been doing?"

"Oh, Pauline, I've been . . . I'm still so unhappy!"

"I guessed that yesterday when I saw you," replied Pauline. "You looked so contented, well-dressed and rich, and yet in reality . . ."

Valentine could not contain himself. A few tears rolled down his face.

"—Pauline! . . . I . . ." he exclaimed.

He could not finish his sentence. His eyes shone with love and his heart seemed to overflow in his glance.

"He loves me! He loves me!" exclaimed Pauline.

Raphael, feeling unable to utter a single word, merely inclined his head. When she saw that, the young girl took his hand and, now laughing now crying, said:

"I'm rich! I'm rich! Your Pauline is rich! . . . Oh! how often I've said I would give all the riches in the world to hear those words . . . 'I love you'. Oh, Raphael, I have millions. You love luxury and you can be ever so happy. But you must love my heart, too, there's so much love in it for you! But don't you know? My father has returned and I'm a rich heiress now. I'm the mistress of my own fate. I'm free . . . do you understand?"

Raphael was delirious with joy. He took the young girl's hands and kissed them ardently, greedily. Pauline disengaged her hands, clasped Raphael round the neck and, with her body trembling with a healthy and delicious fervour, kissed him for the first time.

"Oh!" she said falling back into her chair, "I can't leave you now. I don't know where I got so much courage . . ."

"Courage, Pauline? No, don't be afraid, that's love, true, profound and eternal love, like mine . . . isn't it?"

"Oh! speak, speak, speak!" she said. "You've been silent so long..."

"You love me, then?"

"Oh, God! do I love you! How often I've cried in this room, deploring your misery and mine. I would have sold myself to the devil to share your sorrow! Today, Raphael, because you've given me your beautiful heart and body... O yes, your heart above everything else! ... Where was I? ... Ah, yes... We now have three, four or five millions, I think. If I were poor still, I'd be afraid to take your name, to be your wife, but now I could sacrifice the whole world for you and be your servant. But by giving you my heart, my body and my fortune Raphael, I'm giving you nothing more today than when I placed a hundred sous on your table. How happy you were, then!"

"I don't deserve you!" exclaimed Raphael. "I know that when you are the wife of the Marquis of Valentine you wouldn't ask for..."

"A single hair!" said Pauline.

"I have millions, too. But what do riches mean to us now? I offer you my life, take it."

"Oh! Raphael, I'm the happiest woman in the world!"

"Somebody'll hear you," replied Raphael.

"There's nobody about," she said with a roguish gesture.

"Come then!" said Valentine holding out his arms.

Pauline sat on Raphael's lap and clasped her hands behind his neck.

"Kiss me," she said, "kiss me for all the sorrow you've made me endure, to efface all the pain your happiness gave me. for all the nights I spent painting my fire-screens..."

"Your fire-screens...?"

"Now that you're rich, my darling, I can tell you everything. Poor boy! How easily intellectual men can be deceived! How could you have had white waistcoats and clean shirts for three francs a month? And you drank twice as much milk as you paid for! I caught you in everything

---the fire, the oil and the money! O Raphael, don't make me your wife, I'm too cunning!" she added laughing.

"But how did you do it?"

"I worked morning and night on the fire-screens, and I gave half of what I got to my mother and the other half to you."

They looked at each other for a moment stupidly, drunk with the joy of their new-found love.

"I'm afraid we may have to pay for this happiness one day," said Raphael.

"You won't get married?" replied Pauline. "I won't give you up to any woman!"

"I'm free, my darling, free."

"—Free!" she repeated. "Free, and mine!"

She held Raphael closer to her.

"I'm afraid of going mad," she said passing her hand through her lover's blond hair. "The Countess Feodora is a beast! How resentful she was when she saw me admired by all those men! And when my back touched your arm a voice whispered: 'He's there!' I turned around and saw you. Oh! I'm saved!..."

"I want to cry and I cannot," said Raphael. "Don't take your hand away. I feel I could stay like this all my life looking at you, happy and satisfied."

"Oh! repeat that, my darling!"

"What are words?" replied Valentine, dropping a warm tear on Pauline's hand. "I'll try to express my love for you later, but now I can only feel it."

"That beautiful soul, that heart I know so well, does it all belong to me as mine belongs to you?"

"Forever, my dearest," said Raphael in a voice choked with emotion. "You'll be my wife. Your presence has always dissipated my sorrows and refreshed my soul. Now, your angelic smile has purified me. I feel I've started a new life. The cruel past with its sad follies seem to me to be no more than bad dreams. I feel pure, near you. Be there always!"

"—O Raphael darling," said Pauline after two hours of

silence. "I don't want anyone to enter this dear garret in future."

"We'll have to wall in the door, put a railing on the window and buy the house," replied the Marquis.

"Yes," she said, and then, after a moment's silence: "We've forgotten about the manuscripts!"

They laughed innocently together.

"I make a mockery of science!" exclaimed Raphael.

"And glory?"

"You're my only glory."

"You were very unhappy when you wrote this illegible scrawl, weren't you?" she said turning over the pages.

"My Pauline..."

"O yes, I am your Pauline..."

"Where do you stay?"

"On Saint Lazare Road. And you?"

"On Varenne Road."

"We'll be very far from each other, nearly..."

She stopped suddenly and looked at her lover in a coquettish, almost malicious air.

"But," replied Raphael, "we'll only be separated for 15 days."

"True! In 15 days we'll be married!" And she began to leap around the room like a child.

"Oh, I'm a cruel daughter," she said. "I've forgotten about my father, my mother and everything else in the world! You don't know, darling? My father is very ill. He has returned from India. He nearly died at Harvre where we went to meet him. Oh!" she continued, looking at her watch, "three hours already! I must be at home when he wakes at four o'clock. I'm the mistress of the house, my mother allows me to do as I like and my father adores me . . . but I mustn't abuse their goodness, that wouldn't be nice! Poor father, it was he who sent me to the theatre yesterday . . . Won't you come and see him tomorrow?"

"Madame la Marquise de Valentine, will you do me the honour of accepting my arm?"

"Won't you kiss me again?"

"A thousand times! O God, will it always be like this? I must be dreaming!"

They descended the stairs slowly, and trembling under the weight of the same joy they reached Pauline's carriage, which was waiting for her.

"—I want to see your home," she said. "I want to see your room, your study and sit before the table at which you work. That'll be like old times," she added blushing. "Joseph," she said turning to a valet. "I want to go to Varenne Road before returning home. It's a quarter past three now and I must be back at four. Hurry!"

And in less than a minute the two lovers were taken to Valentine's mansion.

"Oh! How happy I am to have seen all this," Pauline said crumpling the silk curtains which were draped around Raphael's bed. "When I go to sleep I'll be here in thought, and imagine your dear head next to mine on the pillow. Tell me, did you take anybody's advice when you had your mansion decorated?"

"Nobody."

"Truly? It wasn't a woman...?"

"Pauline!"

"Oh, I'm so frightfully jealous! But you've got good taste. I want a bed like yours."

Raphael, overjoyed, seized Pauline by the shoulders.

"—Oh! my father... my father!..." she said.

"I'll take you back. I want to be with you as long as I can," said Valentine.

"You do love me!"

It would be tiresome to reproduce all those tender words of love spoken by the two lovers, and of which only the accent, the look and the untranslatable gesture were of any value. Valentine escorted Pauline home and returned with his heart as full of happiness as it is possible in this world. But when he was seated in his sofa-chair near the fire, thinking of the sudden and inexplicable realisation of all his hopes, a thought pierced his soul like the cold steel

of a sword. He looked at the shagreen skin. It had contracted slightly. He sat silent for a moment staring at the hat-peg without seeing it.

"Good God!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Poor Pauline!"

He took a pair of compasses and measured what the morning had cost him.

"I haven't two months to live!" he said.

A cold sweat broke out over his body. Suddenly, obeying an inexplicable impulse, he seized the shagreen skin and exclaimed: "I'm a beast!"

He ran out of the room, crossed the gardens, and threw the talisman into the well.

"Come what may!..." he said. "To the devil with all this foolishness!"

Raphael then gave himself up entirely to Pauline. Their marriage, which was postponed for some time owing to difficulties which it is unnecessary to relate, was celebrated in March. Needless to say they were very happy, and their happiness having revealed the strength of their own affection for each other, it could hardly be said they were two separate souls or characters; they were perfectly united in their passion. By learning to know each other they came to love each other all the more with a delicacy that was devoid of prudishness; the desire of one was made the law of the other. Since both of them were rich and had no whims to satisfy, they had no whims. While exquisite taste, beautiful feeling and true poetry animated Raphael's soul. Pauline scorned the usual trumpery to which most women were attached and found more beauty in a smile of her husband than all the pearls of Ormus or the richest flowers and muslins in the world. They scorned the world: solitude was to them so beautiful and fecund!

One morning towards the end of February, when the beautiful days gave promise of the joys of spring, Pauline and Raphael had breakfast together in a small hothouse in their garden. The pale winter sun, whose rays broke across the rare shrubs, warmed the atmosphere. The different trees and the colours of the florid tufts stood out

in vigorous contrast, enlivened by the fantasies of light and shade. When all Paris was still warming itself before melancholy fires, the two young newly-weds laughed under a canopy of camelias, lilacs and heather, and their happy heads could be seen above the narcissus, lilies of the valley and roses. The stiff walls of green drill effaced any trace of humidity; the furniture was of rough wood but well polished and tidy. A yellow cat crouched on the table, where it had been attracted by the smell of milk, and Pauline amused herself by tantalising it with the cream. Every few seconds she would burst into laughter, preventing Raphael from reading the newspaper which had already fallen more than six times from his hands. There was, in other words, in this early morning scene that inexpressible happiness which is to be found in everything that is natural and true. While Raphael pretended to read the paper, he clandestinely watched Pauline's game with the cat; he watched his Pauline enveloped in a long dressing gown which covered her imperfectly, his Pauline with her hair in disorder and revealing a small white blue-veined foot in a black velvet slipper. Charming to see in her disordered state, as delicious as the fantastic figures of Westhall, she seemed to be, at the same time, a girl and a woman. When Raphael was absorbed in a brown study and had forgotten all about his paper, Pauline seized it and, after having crumpled it into a ball, threw it into the garden for the cat. Distracted by the noise, Raphael suddenly awoke and, wishing to continue his reading, made a gesture as if to lift up to the paper which was no longer in his hands. And they both burst into frank and joyous laughter.

"I'm jealous of the paper," she said wiping the tears that her childish laughter had brought. "It's a crime that you should want to read some Russian proclamation in my presence, and to prefer the prose of the Emperor Nicholas to words of love."

"I wasn't reading, my lovely angel, I was watching you."

At that moment the heavy footsteps of the gardener could be heard near the entrance of the hothouse.

"Excuse me for interrupting you Monsieur and Madame," he said, "but I've brought a curiosity the like of which I've never seen. When I pulled up a bucket of water just now, I found this singular marine plant. Here it is. It must be accustomed to water because it was neither wet nor humid, but as dry as a piece of wood. And since Monsieur is more learned, I thought it might interest him."

And the gardener showed Raphael the inexorable shagreen skin which was now not more than six square inches.

"Thanks, Vanière," Raphael said, "it's a very curious thing indeed."

"What's the matter, darling? You're pale!" exclaimed Pauline.

"Please leave us Vanière."

"Your voice frightens me," said the young girl. "It has changed. What's the matter? Are you ill?... Yes, you're ill!... A doctor! Jonathas, help!"

"Pauline, dearest, please," said Raphael having regained his sang-froid. "Let's go. There are some flowers here whose smell makes me feel sick. Perhaps it's the verbena."

Pauline pounced on the innocent plant and, seizing it by the stem, threw it out into the garden.

"Oh, darling!" she exclaimed hugging Raphael. "When I saw you turn pale I realised I'd never be able to survive you... your life is mine. Put your arms around me darling. But your lips are hot... and your hands are cold."

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Raphael.

"Why those tears? Let me give you something to drink."

"Oh, Pauline, Pauline, you love me too much!"

"You're hiding something from me Raphael!... Be honest, I'll soon get to know your secret. Give me that," she said indicating the shagreen skin.

"You'll be my scaffold!" exclaimed Raphael, looking horrified at the talisman.

"What a change of voice!" said Pauline.

"Do you love me?" Raphael asked.

"Is that a question to ask me?"

"Then leave me alone."

The poor young girl left him.

"What!" exclaimed Raphael when he was alone, "in an age of enlightenment, when we all know that diamonds are the crystals of carbon, in an epoch when everything has an explanation, when the police submit miracles to the Academy of Science for study, at a time when we no longer believe in the paraphs of notaries, I believe . . . I! . . . in this foolishness! No, by God, no! I think the Supreme Being must find some pleasure in tormenting an honest creature . . . I'll consult the savants."

He crossed the garden and soon arrived at a small pond where some remarkable species of ducks, whose coloured feathers, like the painted glass of a cathedral, sparkled under the rays of the sun, frolicked. All the ducks in the world seemed to be there, shouting and splashing in the water, gathered together into a sort of duck parliament, but happily without a charter or political principles and merely under the protection of naturalists.

"That's Monsieur Lavrille," a servant told Raphael, who had asked to see that great pontiff of zoology.

The Marquis saw a small man sunk in profound meditation at the sight of two ducks. Of middle age, he had a tender face, but his entire person revealed scientific pre-occupation. His wig, incessantly scratched and fantastically turned up, indicated the frenzy that usually accompanies scientific discovery, which, like all passions, uproots us so powerfully from the things of this world that we seem to lose consciousness of ourselves. Raphael, a man of science himself, would have admired the naturalist, whose waking hours were consecrated to the aggrandisement of human knowledge, but a young girl would no doubt have laughed to see him.

After the first few polite phrases had been exchanged, Raphael felt he should pay Monsieur Lavrille's ducks a compliment.

"Oh, we have plenty of ducks," replied the naturalist. "That species, as you must know, is the most fecund of the order of palimpeds. It starts with the swan and finishes with the zinzin duck and embraces one hundred and seventy-seven distinct varieties, whose names, habits, country and physiognomy no more resemble each other than a white man a negro. In truth, sir when we eat a duck . . ."

He stopped at the sight of a small pretty duck which climbed up the bank of the pond.

"That's the cravat swan, which has come all the way from Canada to show us its brown and grey plumage and its small grey cravat! Look, it's preening itself . . . There's the famous downy goose, under the eider-down of which our young girls sleep. Isn't it pretty! Who wouldn't admire that small white stomach and green beak? You have come in time to witness a pairing of which I have so far despaired. Happily, the marriage has been consummated and I am impatiently awaiting the result. I flatter myself to think I may be the creator of the hundredth species, to which, perhaps, my name will be given. 'These are the two husbands,' he said pointing to two drakes. "One is the laughing goose and the other the great whistling duck. I hesitated for a long time between the whistling duck, the white-eyebrowed duck and the shoveller duck. 'There you are . . . that's the shoveller duck, that fat black and brown villain whose greenish neck is so coquettishly curled. You'll realise, sir, that we don't just amuse ourselves here. I'm busy at the moment on a monograph on ducks . . . but I'm at your service."

Raphael submitted the shagreen skin to Monsieur Lavrille's scrutiny.

"I know something about it," the savant said at last, after having examined the talisman through a magnifying glass. "It has sometimes been used to cover boxes. But, today, sheath-makers prefer to use shark-skin, which as you must know, is the cast off of a fish of the Red Sea."

"But this, sir, will you be so kind . . .?"

"This," continued the savant. "is something quite

different. Between this and shark-skin there is, sir, all the differences between ocean and earth, between a fish and a quadruped. However, the skin of a fish is harder than the skin of a land animal. This, as you must no doubt know, is one of the most curious products of zoology."

"What is it?" asked Raphael.

"This, sir," replied the savant, "is the skin of an ass."

"I know that," said the young man.

"In Persia," continued the naturalist "there's an extremely rare species of ass, the onager, which the ancients knew, *equus asinus*. Pallas discovered it and gave it to science. It has long been considered the most fantastic of animals and famous in the Holy Scripture. But the onager is still more famous for the prostitutions of which it has been the object, and of which the Biblical prophets often spoke. Pallas, as you no doubt know, declared that these bizarre excesses are still practised among the Persians. Unfortunately, the Paris Museum does not possess an onager. What a superb animal it is! It is full of mysteries. Its eyes were supposed to have been provided with a sort of reflector, to which the Orientals attributed its power of fascination. Its skin is more elegant and polished than any of our most beautiful horses and has fawn coloured bands which make it resemble the zebra. There's something soft about its hair, which is oily to the touch, and its sight is equal in precision to that of any man. A little taller than our best domestic asses, it is endowed with extraordinary courage. If by chance it is taken by surprise, it defends itself with remarkable superiority against the most ferocious beasts. As for its walk, it can only be compared with the flight of birds. An onager, sir, would outrun the best Persian or Arab horses. According to Dr. Niebuhr, who, you must certainly know, we recently lost, it takes seven million geometric steps to the hour. It is impossible to get an idea of that proud and independent ass from the degenerate species of our day. It has a nimble carriage, an intelligent and gracious face and movements which are full of mystery! It is really the zoological king of the Orient.

Persian and Turkish superstitions endow it with a mysterious origin, and the name of Solomon is mixed up with the stories related about its prowess. A tame onager commands a huge sum of money. It is almost impossible to catch it in the mountains, where it capers about like a deer and seems to fly like a bird. The fables of winged horses, our Pegasus for instance, no doubt took birth in those countries where shepherds were often able to see the onager leaping from one rock to another. Saddle-asses, which are obtained in Persia by the pairing of a she-ass with a tame onager, are painted red, following an innumerable tradition, and that custom has perhaps given rise to the proverb: 'As naughty as a red ass'. The skin you've given me is that of an onager. We differ on the origin of the name. Some pretend that chagri is a Turkish word, others that chagre must be the town where the skin underwent that chemical change described by Pallas which gives it the appearance we admire so much. Martellas said that chagri was a river..."

"Sir, I must thank you for the information you've given me, but I should tell you that this fragment was originally the same size as... as this map," Raphael said showing Lavrille an open atlas, "and that, in the last three months, it has shrunk..."

"Good," replied the savant. "I understand. The skins of all primitive animals are subject to a wasting away, the extent of which depends on atmospheric influence. Metals themselves expand or contract, that is a known fact among engineers. But science is so vast and human life so short, that we cannot pretend to be familiar with all the phenomena of nature."

"Sir," replied Raphael somewhat confused, "would you mind if I asked you a question? Are you quite sure that this skin is subject to the ordinary laws of zoology and that it can be stretched?"

"Certainly!... Of course!" exclaimed Lavrille. "But if you want you can see Planchette, the famous professor of mechanics, who'll certainly be able to find something to soften and stretch the skin."

"Thank you, sir, you've saved my life!"

Raphael bade the learned naturalist goodbye, leaving him in the middle of his study filled with glass jars and dried plants. The good-natured Lavrille resembled Sancho Panza when he related the story of the goats to Don Quixote. But Raphael was quite satisfied.

Planchette was a tall man, a real poet lost in the eternal contemplation of a bottomless abyss-movement. The vulgar have accused such sublime minds as his of folly, minds which live supremely indifferent to luxury and the world, spend whole days smoking a burnt-out cigar and always enter a salon never having correctly buttoned up their coats. One day, after much study and analysis, they discover some simple principles of natural law and, suddenly, the world stands in admiration before some new machine, the simple structure of which astonishes and mystifies it! The modest savant then smiles and tells his admirers: "What have I created? Nothing! Man does not invent a power, he directs it, and science only consists in imitating nature."

Raphael found the mechanician on his feet, like a man who had just dropped from the gallows. Planchette was watching an agate ball rolling on a sun-dial, waiting for it to stop. The poor man had neither been decorated nor had he been given a pension; he thought neither of the world nor of glory, nor of himself, but lived for science for the sake of science.

"But this is unaccountable," he exclaimed. "—Ah!" he said when he saw Raphael, "I'm entirely at your service. How's your mother?..."

"I wish I could live like that!" thought Raphael, who disturbed the savant's reverie by asking him how the talisman, which he presented to him, could be stretched.

"Don't laugh at me, sir," concluded the Marquis. "I've hidden nothing from you. But it seems to me that this skin possesses a power of resistance against which nothing can prevail."

"Sir," replied Planchette, "worldly people always treat science in a most cavalier fashion, they all say exactly what

one said to Talander after the eclipse: 'Would you be so good as to repeat that?' But what effect do you want to produce? The object of mechanics is to apply the laws of movement or to neutralise them. As for movement itself, I must tell you quite plainly that we are not in a position to define it. We have observed the constant phenomena which rule the action of solids and liquids. In reproducing the generating causes of those phenomena, we can transport bodies, transmit to them a locomotive force, hurl them about, modify them, squeeze them, dilate them and stretch them. Such a science, sir, rests but on a single fact. You see that ball? Now it is here, and now it is there. What would you call such an action, which is physically so natural and yet so extraordinary? Movement, locomotion or change of place? What a world of nothingness is hidden under words! Is a name a solution? But that seems to be science. Our machines make use of that act, that fact. That simple phenomenon, when it is adapted to masses, can make the whole of Paris tremble. We can augment rapidity at the expense of force or force at the expense of rapidity. But what is force and rapidity? Our science is unable to say. Movement, whatever it is, is an immense power and man does not invent powers. Power is the essence of movement. Everything is movement, nature is based on movement and death is movement, the end of which is unknown. And if God is eternal he must be in eternal movement. Perhaps God himself is movement. That's why movement, like Him, is inexplicable, infinite and intangible. Who has ever touched, understood or measured movement? We feel the effects without seeing them. We can even repudiate them, as we repudiate God. Where is it? Where isn't it? Where does it come from? What is its principle, and where does it end? It surrounds us, actuates us, but escapes us. As a fact, it is evident, as an abstraction obscure, and it is at the same time cause and effect. Space is as necessary to it as to us, but what is space? Only movement reveals it to us, without it it becomes a meaningless word. Like space, creation and infinity, movement is an insoluble

problem which confounds the human mind, and all that man can understand about it is that he can never understand it. Between each of the successive points occupied by that ball in space, reason is only confronted with an abyss, an abyss into which Pascal fell. To set an unknown substance going we must first study it, or it will break up under the shock or resist. If it breaks up and it is not your intention to break it up, we won't realise the necessary end. If you want to compress it, it is necessary to transmit a movement equally to all parts of the substance, and if you want to stretch it, an equal eccentric force must be impressed on each molecule. There exists, sir, in the world, an infinite combination of movement. What do you want done?"

"I want something which can stretch this skin indefinitely," replied Raphael impatiently.

"The substance being small," said the mathematician, "it cannot be indefinitely stretched, and the expansion of its surface must necessarily be at the expense of its thickness, it will become thinner."

"If you do that," said Raphael, "you'll earn millions."

"That would be robbing you," the professor replied angrily. "I'm going to show you a machine under which God himself could be crushed like a fly. It'll reduce a man to blotting paper, a man wearing shoes, spurs, a cravat, a hat, jewels... everything..."

"What a horrible machine!"

Planchette took a flower pot, made a hole at the bottom, and placed it on the slab of the gnomon. Then he went out into the garden to look for some clay. Raphael sat charmed like a child listening to some fabulous story related by its nurse. After having placed the clay on the slab, Planchette took out a knife from his pocket, cut two pieces of an elder branch and began to hollow them out, whistling to himself.

"These are the parts of the machine," he said.

With the clay he attached one of the wooden pipes to the bottom of the pot so that the hole of the elder branch

corresponded to that of the pot. He spread the clay out on the slab and placed the flower pot on it. He then put some more clay on the elder tube and attached the other branch to it in a way that air, or any fluid, could circulate inside the improvised machine and run from the mouth of the vertical tube, across the intermediary canal, into the empty flower pot.

"This apparatus," he said to Raphael, "is one of Pascal's greatest claims to our admiration."

"I don't understand..."

The savant smiled. He detached a small bottle from a fruit tree, turned it into a funnel by breaking the bottom of it and fixed it carefully to the elder tube. Then, with the help of a watering can, he poured some water into the flower pot . . . Raphael thought of his shagreen skin.

"Even today," said the mechanician, "water is held to be an incompressible body . . . don't forget that fundamental principle. Nevertheless, it condenses, but so slowly, that its faculty to contract is regarded as zero. Do you see the surface of the water at the superficies of the flower pot?"

"Yes."

"Well, suppose that that surface were a thousand times larger than the orifice of the elder stick through which I've poured the liquid. Wait, I'll take off the funnel..."

"Agreed."

"Now, if in some way I augment the volume of that mass by pouring some more water through the orifice of the small pipe, the fluid, forced to descend, would reach the reservoir made by the flower pot and gain the same level in the one as in the other..."

"That's obvious!" said Raphael.

"But there's this difference," the savant continued. "If a force equal to a pound, for example, were exerted in the column of water in the vertical tube, and because its action will be transmitted to the liquid mass, which will react on all points of the surface in the flower pot, then a thousand columns of water will be raised as if they were pushed by a force equal to that which makes the liquid descend into

the vertical elder stick, and will necessarily produce here," Planchette pointed to the opening of the flower pot, "a force a thousand times greater than the force introduced there." And the savant indicated the wooden pipe planted in the clay.

"It's very simple," said Raphael.

Planchette smiled.

"In other words," he said, with that tenacity peculiar to all mathematicians, "it is necessary to push the eruption of the water back and to use on every part of the surface a force equal to that created in the vertical tube. But with this difference that, if the liquid column is more than a foot high, the thousand small columns would only register a small rise. Now let's replace this grotesque apparatus by metallic tubes of the necessary force and dimension. If you cover the fluid surface of the reservoir with platinum, and, in opposition to it, use something else whose solidity and resistance are fully proof, and, if again, you add water continually, through the small vertical tube to the liquid mass, then the object, caught between the two solids, will give in and be indefinitely compressed. In mechanics the way to introduce water continually through the small tube and the transmission of force from the liquid mass to the platinum is a trifle. Two pistons and some valves are enough. There isn't a substance in existence, my dear sir, which, caught between those two forces, cannot be stretched."

"What! The author of Provincial Letters invented . . . ?" exclaimed Raphael.

"The very same man, sir. There's nothing in mechanics more simple or beautiful. The contrary principle, the expansibility of water, has created the steam engine. But water can only expand to a certain degree, although its incompressibility, being a negative force of some kind, is necessarily infinite."

"If that skin stretches," said Raphael, "I promise to erect a colossal statue of Blaise Pascal, to found a prize of hundred thousand francs for the best mechanical problem

solved every ten years and build an asylum for mathematicians who have become mad or poor."

"That would be most useful," replied Planchette, with that calm common to men living in an entirely intellectual world. "But we'll see Spieghalter tomorrow. That distinguished mechanic has built a perfect machine with my plans."

"Tomorrow then, sir."

"Tomorrow."

"Isn't mechanics the most beautiful of all sciences?" said Raphael to himself.

The next day Raphael, with Planchette, went to see Spieghalter. The young man found himself in an immense room with a multitude of red forges. There seemed to be a storm of fire, a deluge of nails, an ocean of pistons, screws, levers, crossbars, files and nuts, and a sea of cast iron, wood, plugs and steel bars; there was fire in the air, the men seemed to be covered with fire, everything smelt of fire, which assumed life, took all kinds of forms and obeyed all sorts of caprices. Across the howling of the bellows, the crescendo of the hammers and the whistling of the turning-boxes, Raphael came upon a large machine, clean and well polished, and contemplated at ease the immense press of which Planchette had spoken to him.

"If you turn that winch quickly seven times," Spieghalter told him, "steel will spout in thousands of jets which would enter your legs like thousands of needles."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Raphael.

Planchette himself slipped the shagreen skin between the plates of the powerful machine and, full of that conviction that scientific knowledge breeds, turned the handle.

"Lie down everybody!" Spieghalter shouted in a thundering voice.

A horrible howl echoed through the place. The water in the machine broke the cast iron, produced a jet of immeasurable force and, fortunately, spouted on to an old

forge which it turned over and over again, twisted it as a water-spout twists a house, and carried it away with it.

"Oh!" said Planchette calmly, "there's no change whatever in the skin! There must have been a flaw in your machine or some opening in the tube..."

"No, no, there's nothing wrong. The gentleman can take his skin back, there's a devil in it!"

The German seized a hammer, placed the skin on an anvil and, with all the force that his anger bred, delivered on the talisman the most terrible blow that had echoed through the place.

"No impression at all," said Planchette feeling the rebellious skin.

The workers gathered around. The master took the skin and plunged it into the fire. Everybody ranged around in a semi-circle listening patiently to the bellows being worked. Raphael, Spieghalter and Planchette occupied the centre of the dark and attentive crowd. When he saw all those eyes and heads lit up by the fire, those black shining clothes and those hairy chests, Raphael for a moment thought he had been transported to that nocturnal and fantastic world of the German ballads. The master then seized the skin with the tongs, after having left it in the fire for about ten minutes.

"Give it to me," said Raphael. The German jokingly presented it to Raphael, who felt the skin, now cold and supple, with his hands. A cry of horror arose and the workers fled. Valentine was left alone with Planchette in the deserted place.

"There's certainly something diabolic about that skin!" said Raphael. "Can no human power give me one more day of life?"

"I've made a mistake," replied the mathematician contritely. "The skin must be submitted to the action of a rolling-mill. Whatever made me suggest a machine!"

"I asked you," replied Raphael.

The savant breathed as freely as a criminal who had

been acquitted by twelve jurors. However, the strange problem of the skin still held his interest.

"I think it should be treated by some reagents," he said after reflecting for a while. "We'll see Japhet about it. Chemistry may be more successful than mechanics."

Valentine, in the hope of catching the celebrated chemist, Japhet, in his laboratory, ordered his horses to be galloped.

"Well, my old friend," Planchette said when he saw Japhet seated in a sofa-chair studying a precipitate, "and how is your chemistry going?"

"It's asleep. Nothing new. The Academy, however, has recognised the existence of salicine, but salicine, esparagine, vanqueline and digitaline are not discoveries..."

"Instead of inventing things," said Raphaël, "it looks as if you've been reduced to inventing names."

"That's quite true, young man!"

"Well," said Planchette to the chemist, "try to analyse this substance for us. If you can do something with it, I'll call it *diaboline* because, in attempting to stretch it, we've broken a hydraulic press!"

"Let's see, let's see!" the chemist exclaimed happily. "It may be a new substance..."

"It's only a piece of ass's skin," said Raphaël.

"Sir..." the celebrated chemist said indignantly.

"I'm not joking," said the Marquis presenting the skin.

Japhet's tongue, which was so accustomed to tasting salts, acids, alkali and gas, was applied to the skin.

"No taste!" he said after a few seconds. "I'll put some acid on it."

When submitted to the action of the acid, which normally dissolved any animal tissue, the skin showed not the least alteration.

"This is no skin!" exclaimed the chemist. "We'll have to treat it as a mineral and put it into a refractory crucible with some red potash."

Japhet left them and returned almost immediately. "6

"Would you let me cut a piece of this singular substance, sir?" he asked Raphael.

"A piece? Try!" replied Raphael in a voice that was at the same time sad and ironic.

The savant broke a razor trying to cut the skin. He tried to break it up by a strong discharge of electricity, then he submitted it to the action of a galvanic battery, but everything that his science had conceived miscarried on the terrible talisman. It was nearly seven o'clock, but Planchette, Japhet and Raphael had not noticed the passage of time awaiting the results of a last experiment. The skin, however, emerged victorious again.

"I'm lost!" said Raphael. "I'm going to die..."

He left the two savants stupefied.

"We can't relate this to the Academy," Planchette said to the chemist after a long pause, during which they stared at each other without daring to speak, "our colleagues will laugh at us."

The two savants were like Christians who, after having left their tombs, found no God in heaven. Science? Useless! Acids? Water! Red potash? Dishonoured! The galvanic battery? A toy!

"A hydraulic press broke like a sippet!" added Planchette.

Both of them were bewildered because, for a mechanician, the universe is a machine, while the chemist regards the world as a gas endowed with movement.

"We can't deny it," said the chemist.

Valentine returned home in a cold rage. He felt he could no longer believe in anything, his thoughts swirled and wavered in his mind like all men confronted with an inexplicable fact. He would have willingly believed in some undiscovered defect in Spieghalter's machine and the impotency of science did not surprise him, but the suppleness of the skin when he handled it, its toughness when all the means of destruction at the disposal of man were directed on it frightened him. That indisputable fact made him feel giddy.

"I'm going mad," he said to himself. "Although I've eaten nothing since this morning, I'm neither hungry nor thirsty, and I feel as if my bosom is on fire..."

He placed the skin back into its former frame and, after having drawn a red line round it, he sat down on his sofa-chair.

"Eight years already!" he exclaimed. "It's passed like a dream."

With his head in his hands and his elbows resting on the arms of the chair, he remained lost in melancholy meditation.

"Oh, Pauline!" he exclaimed. "Poor child! There are obstacles which even love cannot surmount, in spite of the strength of its wings."

At that moment he distinctly heard a smothered sigh, and recognised, by the sound, that it must be Pauline.

A burst of frank and joyous laughter made him turn his head towards the bed. Through the diaphanous curtains he saw Pauline's face smiling like a happy child. Her beautiful hair fell in millions of curls on her shoulders, and she looked like a flower on a bed of roses.

"I seduced Jonathas," she said. "Doesn't this bed belong to me as much as to you? After all I'm your wife: Don't be angry, darling, I only wanted to be near you and surprise you. I'm sorry if I've been foolish."

Looking radiant in muslin, she leaped out of bed like a cat and sat on Raphael's lap.

"What obstacles were you talking about?" she asked anxiously.

"Death."

"You make me sick," she said. "Death doesn't frighten me. To die with you tomorrow morning, after a last kiss, would be sheer joy. But I feel I still have a hundred more years to live. What do the number of days matter if, in a night, in an hour, we could exhaust the whole of life?"

"You're right. Heaven speaks through your pretty mouth. Give me a kiss and... let's die," said Raphael.

"Let's die," she said laughing.

Towards nine o'clock in the morning the sun poured into the room through the blinds of the windows. Although subdued by the muslin curtains, it still permitted one to see the rich colours of the carpets and the silken furniture of the room where the two lovers still slept. A ray of light reached the soft eider-down that had been thrown on the ground. Suspended on a large cheval-glass, Pauline's dress looked like a nebulous apparition, while her dainty shoes were thrown in a corner. The noise of a nightingale, which was perched on the window-sill, suddenly opening its wings to fly away, awoke Raphael.

"To die," he said, completing some thought he had begun in a dream, "there must be something wrong with this body of mine, this mechanism of flesh and bone animated by my will*and which makes me an individual. The doctors should be able to find out and tell me whether I'm in good or bad health."

He contemplated his sleeping wife, whose head was near his, and which, even during sleep, seemed to express the tender solicitude of love. Stretched out like a child, Pauline appeared to be looking at him, her mouth half-open. Her small, white porcelain teeth enhanced the redness of her fresh lips, on which a smile strayed, and her skin looked whiter than at any of the most amorous hours of the day. Her gracious and confident abandon, mingled with her charm, revealed all the most adorable traits of the sleeping child. Women, even the most natural, normally obey, during the day, certain social conventions which cramp the naïve expressions of their soul, but sleep seems to give them that frankness which is so characteristic of children. She looked like one of those celestial creatures behind whose gestures and looks there is no ulterior motive. Her profile stood out against the fine cambric of the pillows, and the rough frills, which were entwined in her disordered hair, gave her a roguish appearance. Her delicate red and white ear, shaped like a shell and framed by a tuft of her own hair would certainly have driven an artist mad and might easily have restored reason to a maniac. There

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is nothing more beautiful than to see your mistress asleep, smiling to herself in some peaceful dream, and stripped of all that is bestial in her! To see an unsuspecting, half-naked woman, enveloped in her love as in a cloak and chaste even in the midst of disorder, to admire her clothes and silk stockings which were torn off the previous evening to please you, isn't it sheer joy? Raphael looked around the room, which was so full of memories for him, and turned his eyes again towards Pauline, who immediately awoke as if a ray of light had struck her face.

"Good morning, darling," she said smiling.

Both of them together, with their faces stamped with the graces of youth and love, reminded one of those divine scenes whose transitory magic belongs to the early days of love, just as naïveté and candour can only be the attributes of infancy. But alas! those early joys of love, even the laughter of our youth, must leave us and only live in our memories to exasperate or console us according to the whims of our secret thoughts.

"Why did you wake?" Raphael said. "It was so pleasant to see you asleep... I almost cried..."

"And I, too," she replied. "I cried last night, but not with joy, when I saw you asleep. Listen to me, Raphael darling, listen. When you're asleep you don't breathe freely, there's something in your chest which makes a noise. I feel so frightened. You also have a dry cough, just like my father's. There is in the noise something of the peculiar effects of consumption. And you had fever, I'm sure of it, your hand was moist and warm... Darling, you're young," she added, "you can still be cured, if... no, no, the disease is infectious so the doctors say..."

She put her arms around Raphael and held his breath in one of those kisses in which the very soul seems to be present.

"I don't want to live to be old," she said. "Let's die young, and go to heaven together."

"Such thoughts always come to us when we are"

healthy," replied Raphael plunging his fingers into Pauline's hair.

But suddenly he had a fit of coughing, of grave and sonorous coughing that seemed to emerge from the tomb, and which turned his forehead pale and left him trembling and sweating after having shaken up his nerves and spinal marrow. Raphael, wan and broken, lay back, overwhelmed like a man whose entire strength had been spent in a last effort. Pauline stared at him with fixed eyes and growing fear.

"Let's not be foolish, my darling," she said, trying to hide from him the horrible thoughts which disturbed her.

She covered his face with her hands because she felt she could already see the hideous mask of death on it. Raphael's head had become livid and sunken like a skull which had been torn out of some tomb to serve the studies of a savant. Pauline recalled the exclamation which had escaped from him the previous evening.

"Yes," she said to herself, "there are obstacles which even love cannot surmount."

A few days later, Raphael found himself seated in a sofa-chair before a window surrounded by four doctors who, in turn, felt his pulse and examined and questioned him with apparent interest. The sick man tried to gauge their thoughts by interpreting their gestures and the smallest wrinkle which appeared on their foreheads. They were his last hope. Those supreme judges would pronounce life or death for him. Thanks to his fortune and his name, the three systems between which human knowledge hovered were there before him. They represented among themselves the whole of medical philosophy—spirituality, analysis and eclecticism. The fourth doctor was Horace Bianchon, the most distinguished perhaps among the younger men, wise and modest, ready to gather the heritage amassed during the last fifty years by the Paris School and who would one day, perhaps, build the monument for which the preceding centuries had contributed so much material. A friend of the Marquis, he had been attending him for the

past twelve days, helping him to reply to the questions asked by the professors and sometimes explaining to them, with quiet insistence, the symptoms which made him feel it must be consumption.

"You've no doubt led a life of excess and dissipation, haven't you? Or you've been engaged on some exacting intellectual work?" one of the three celebrated doctors, whose square head and large face seemed to reveal a superior mind, asked Raphael.

"I did at one time want to kill myself with debauchery," replied Raphael, "after having worked for three years on a book which will probably one day keep you busy."

The great doctor shook his head with satisfaction as if to say: 'I was sure of it!' He was the illustrious Brisset, the successor of Cabanis and Bichat, a doctor with a positive and materialistic mind, who recognised man to be a finite being uniquely subject to the laws of his own body and whose normal state and deleterious anomalies were explained by evident causes.

With this reply Brisset silently looked at a middle-aged man whose purple face and ardent eye seemed to belong to some satyr, and who, with his back against the embrasure, was attentively watching Raphael without saying a word. A man of faith and enthusiasm, Doctor Caméristus, the poetic defender of the abstract doctrines of Van Helmont, saw in human life an elevated and secret principle, an inexplicable phenomenon, a sort of intangible and invisible flame which deceived surgery and the medicines of the chemist and laughed at all our efforts.

A sardonic smile appeared on the lips of the third, Doctor Maugredie, a distinguished man, but a cynic and a pyrrhonist. He only believed in the scalpel and, though he conceded with Brisset that a man's death was wonderful, he recognised, with Caméristus, that a man can still live after death. He found something good in every theory, accepted none, and maintained that the best medical system was to have none but to keep to the facts. He was examining the shagreen skin.

"I want to witness the coincidence between your wish and its contraction," he said to the Marquis.

"Why?" asked Brisset.

"Why?" repeated Caméristus.

"Ah! you agree!" replied Maugredie.

"The contraction is quite simply explained," added Brisset.

"It's supernatural," said Caméristus.

"In fact," said Maugredie gravely, returning the shagreen skin to Raphael, "though the contraction of the skin is an inexplicable fact, it is nevertheless natural and has, since the beginning of the world, been the despair of doctors and pretty women."

Examining the three doctors closely, Valentine could discover no sympathy in them for his illness. All three of them, silent after each reply of his, surveyed him indifferently and questioned him pitilessly. Whether certain or not, they spoke so rarely and indifferently, that sometimes Raphael felt they could not be thinking of him at all. To all the symptoms which Bianchon pointed out, Brisset merely murmured: 'Good! Good!' Caméristus seemed to be plunged in a profound dream, while Maugredie resembled a comic author studying original characters to put into his next book. Horace's face betrayed deep anxiety and compassion. He had been a doctor for too short a period to remain unmoved before suffering or approaching death. He could not suppress the tears which rose to his eyes. After having remained for about half an hour to take the measure, as it were, of the patient and his malady, just as a tailor might measure a young man ordering his wedding suit, the doctors exchanged few words, spoke even of public affairs, and then decided to retire to Raphael's study to communicate their impressions to each other and pronounce their sentence.

"Can't I be present, gentlemen?" Valentine asked.

Brisset and Maugredie immediately protested and, in spite of the entreaties of their patient, refused to discuss the matter in his presence. Raphael bowed to custom, but at

the same time thought how he could slip into the corridor from where he could easily hear all that might be said.

"Gentlemen," said Brisset as soon as they entered the study, "allow me to give you my opinion first. I don't want either to impose it on you or hear it discussed, because it's distinct and precise, and the result of a complete resemblance I have observed between one of my patients and the man we have been called in to examine. I have to be back at the hospital and I'm sure you'll excuse my speaking first. The patient has been equally exhausted by intellectual work . . . What has he written Horace?" he asked the young doctor.

"A Theory of the Will."

"Lord! that's a vast subject! He's exhausted, I say, by excessive thought, an inadequate diet and the repeated use of stimulants. The violent action of the body and the brain has vitiated the whole organism. It is easy, gentlemen, to recognise in the symptoms on the face and the body a prodigious irritation of the stomach, neurosis of the sympathetic gland, a quick sensibility of the epigastrium and a contraction of the hypochondrium. And you have no doubt noticed the swelling of the liver. Monsieur Bianchon has carefully watched the digestion of his patient and has told us that it is difficult and laborious. Properly speaking, he has no stomach at all, and the mind has become atrophied because he can't digest anything. The progressive degeneration of the epigastrium, the centre of life, has vitiated the entire system, and the disorder has reached the brain through the nervous plexus. The patient is also suffering from monomania; he's weighed down by a fixed thought. As far as he's concerned, the shagreen skin really contracts. Perhaps it has always been as we have seen it, but whether it contracts or not, the skin is to him what a fly was on the nose of a certain great vizier. Leeches must be immediately applied on the epigastrium to relieve the irritation of the organ in which the entire man resides, and if the patient, besides, is kept on diet, the monomania will cease. There's no need for me to say anything more to Doctor Bianchon."

There may perhaps be some complication, perhaps the respiratory organs are equally irritated, but I believe the relief of the stomach to be much more important, necessary and urgent than that of the lungs. The study of abstract matters has produced some serious disturbance in that vital organ. However, there's still time to restore its strength. You can thus easily save your friend," he concluded turning to Bianchon.

"Our learned colleague has mistaken the effect for the cause," said Caméristus. "Yes, the changes which he has observed in the patient do exist, but it is not the stomach that has gradually spread its virus throughout the organism, as a crack in a pane of glass might spread. A blow was necessary to crack the window: who delivered that blow? Do we know that? Have we studied the patient sufficiently? Do we know everything about his life? Gentlemen, the vital principle, Van Helmont's principle of life, has been attacked. The divine spark, the transitory intelligence which links together the entire machine, has ceased to regulate the daily phenomena of the mechanism and the functions of each organ. It is from that that the disorders, which our colleague has so cleverly observed, spring. The movement is not from the epigastrium to the brain, but from the brain to the epigastrium. No! I'm not made up of a stomach merely! Everything is not to be found in the stomach. I cannot have the courage to say that, if I have a good epigastrium, everything else is in order... Moreover, we cannot submit different people suffering from a similar disease to the same treatment. No man resembles another. Our organs are peculiar to each one of us, and each fulfils its function according to an order of things which is unknown to us. The divine will, which maintains us in a state of animation, acts in a distinct manner in each man. We must study each man separately, we must know his life and understand him. There are an infinity of nuances between the softness of a wet sponge and the hardness of a pumice stone. Therefore, the treatment should be something moral. Let's look for the cause of the malady

in the entrails of the soul and not in the entrails of the stomach! A doctor is an inspired being endowed with a particular genius, to whom God concedes the power to read the body as he gives to the prophet the eyes to look into the future, to the poet the faculty to evoke nature, to the musician the arrangement of sounds into an harmonious order, the original of which is above perhaps! . . ."

"His absolutist and religious medicine again!" said Brisset to himself.

"Gentlemen," interrupted Maugredie, "let's not lose sight of the patient . . ."

"And this is science!" said Raphael to himself. "My recovery seems to hover between a rosary and a string of leeches, between the bistoury of Dupuytren and the prayer of the Prince of Hohenlohe! It's always yes and no! At least Planchette was more frank when he said he didn't know."

Valentine could hear Maugredie's voice.

"The patient is a monomaniac, well, may be!" he said. "But he has an income of two hundred million pounds a year. Monomaniacs like him must be very rare! As to whether his epigastrium has affected his brain or the brain his epigastrium, we shall never know until he's dead. He's sick, that fact is incontestable. And he needs to be treated. Let's leave systems aside for the moment. We'll use leeches to relieve his intestinal irritation and nervous disorder, on the existence of which we are agreed, and then we'll advise him to go to the waters. If he's suffering from lung trouble we can't save him . . ."

Raphael immediately left the corridor to return to his sofa-chair. The four doctors soon emerged from the study.

"These gentlemen," said Horace, "have unanimously recognised the need of an immediate application of leeches to your stomach and the urgency of a treatment which is at the same time physical and moral. You'll be placed on a diet to calm the irritation of your organism . . ."

Here Brisset made a sign of approbation.

". . . and then a period of rest for your mind. That

we unanimously advise you to visit the waters of Aix in Savoy, or those of Dore in Auvergne, if you prefer it. The air and altitude of Savoy are more agreeable than those of Cantal, but that's left to you."

Here Doctor Caméristus made a gesture of assent.

"These gentlemen," continued Bianchon, "have also discovered some change in your respiratory organs and have agreed on the efficacy of my prescription. They feel you can be easily cured if you make wise use of these various remedies . . . and . . ."

When Raphael and Bianchon later found themselves alone in the study, the former frankly admitted what he thought of the doctors.

"At least they're logical," replied the young doctor. "Caméristus feels, Brisset examines and Maugredie doubts, but hasn't man a soul, a body and reason? All three of these things strongly influence us and human science can never be entirely dispassionate. Believe me, Raphael, we don't cure, we can only help to cure. Between Brisset's medicine and that of Caméristus, we still have to discover the ideal medicine, and to practise that we shall have to know a patient for ten years. As in all sciences, there's negation at the bottom of medicine. Try to live wisely and take a trip to Savoy. The best cure is, and always will be, to entrust oneself to nature."

A month later, on a beautiful evening in summer, the people who were at the waters of Aix gathered together, after their walk, in the salons of the Cercle. Seated near a window with his back to the assembly, Raphael remained for a long time plunged in one of those mechanical reveries during which our thoughts take birth and vanish, with us hardly being aware of them. The soul is nearly asleep and sadness becomes sweet and joy vaporous. Bathed in the tepid evening air of the mountains Raphael was happy; he felt no pain and knew that he had at last subjugated the menacing shagreen skin. When the sun sank behind the mountains in a blaze of red and the temperature dropped, he left his chair closing the window.

"Sir," said an old lady to him. "would you mind opening that window? We're suffocating . . ."

The sound of her voice was so singularly sharp that it seemed to tear Raphael's ear-drum. The Marquis stared coldly at the old woman, called a servant and said:

"Open that window!"

Lively surprise appeared on the faces of all those present when they heard his words. They began to whisper to each other and look significantly at Raphael as if he had committed some grave wrong. The Marquis, who had not entirely rid himself of his youthful timidity, was, for a moment, afraid. But he soon shook off his torpor, regained his courage and took stock of the strange scene before him. Then something suddenly seemed to snap in his brain and the past appeared before him in a distinct vision. He recognised himself in the fugitive picture and followed his own life, day by day, and thought by thought. He saw himself, not without surprise, serious and distracted amidst the laughing world, always dreaming of his destiny, pre-occupied with his own illness and fleeing from ephemeral intimacies and insignificant gossip. He seemed like a rock indifferent to the furious caresses of the waves. Then by a rare intuitive privilege he read 'into everyone's souls. He saw, under the glimmer of a light, the yellow and sardonic face of an old man and, later, a pretty woman whose allurements left him cold. Each face seemed to reproach him for some inexplicable wrong. He had involuntarily crushed all the petty vanities which had gravitated around him. Everybody seemed to be irritated by his luxury and accused him of snobbery. Rich, and possessing a superior mind, he was both envied and hated; his silence was interpreted as curiosity and his modesty as haughtiness. He realised the unpardonable crime of which he was guilty among them, and was happy to have escaped from the jurisdiction of their mediocrity. A rebel against their inquisitorial despotism he dispensed with them, and to avenge themselves they instinctively leagued themselves in order to make him feel their power, to ostracise him and teach him that they too

could dispense with him. At first a feeling of pity passed through him but he shivered when he thought of the supple power which had raised the veil for him and he closed his eyes as if to shut out the world. At that moment he had a violent fit of coughing. Far from hearing even indifferent words of sympathy or polite compassion, he heard hostile interjections and fears expressed in whispers.

"His illness is contagious . . ."

"The President of the Cercle should stop him from coming here."

"He shouldn't cough like that!"

"When a man's sick he shouldn't visit the waters . . ."

"He'll drive me away from here!"

Raphael, to rid himself of the general curses, walked about the room. He tried to find somebody to talk to and, when he found a young woman sitting idly by herself, he walked up to her. But on his approach she turned her back on him and pretended to be watching the dancers. He had neither the courage nor the inclination to open a conversation. He left the salon and took refuge in the billiard room. But even there nobody spoke to or took the slightest notice of him. His naturally meditative mind soon revealed to him the cause of the aversion he had excited. The world obeyed, without being aware of it perhaps, the great law which governed high society, the implacable ethics of which were being fully unfolded before Raphael's eyes. He knew he could expect to get no sympathy for his malady, because the fashionable world banished from its midst the unfortunate just as a man of vigorous health expels some morbidic germ from his body. The world abhors sorrows and misfortune, it dreads them like contagious diseases, and never hesitates between them and vice, because vice, after all, is a luxury. Society can only ridicule with an epigram the misfortune of some suffering person and caricature an effrontery that it believes it has received. Like the young Romans of the Circus it never sympathises with the gladiator who falls. Death to the feeble! is the vow taken by the equestrians of all nations, and the sentence is

written at the bottom of hearts which have either been petrified by luxury or nourished by aristocracy. Even among a set of school children you will find slaves, creatures of suffering and misfortune, who are constantly subjected to scorn or pity. And to go lower in the ladder of organised beings, what happens to a fowl in a farmyard when it is hurt? The others follow it about, peck at it and eventually kill it. In society, if a man lacks money or power, or suffers in body or in soul, he is an outcast. It would be better if he remained in the desert! If he enters society he only enters a perpetual winter: cold looks, cold manners, cold words and cold hearts. And he would be lucky if he were not insulted where he expected to find consolation! (It would be better for dying men to remain on their deserted beds, old men to sit alone before their cold hearths and poor girls to freeze and burn in their solitary attics! It is thus that the world honours the unfortunate: it kills him or drives him out, degrades him or castrates him.)

These reflections rose in Raphael's mind with the suddenness of a poetic inspiration. He looked around him and could actually feel the sinister chill which society distils and which seizes the soul faster than the winter of December affects the body. He folded his arms, leaned against the high wall, and fell into a melancholy mood. He thought of the little good civilisation had brought the world. What were they? Amusements without pleasure, gaiety without joy, feasts without enjoyment and wood in a hearth without a spark of fire. When he lifted his head again he found himself alone; all the players had fled.

"If I only reveal my power to them how they'd adore my cough!" he said to himself.

The next day the doctor came to see him. He seemed to be uneasy about Raphael's health. The Marquis was happy to hear the friendly words addressed to him. He found the doctor's face pleasant, the curls of his wig seemed to exhale philanthropy, the cut of his clothes, the folds of his trousers, his large Quaker shoes, everything, including his slightly curved back, expressed Christian charity.

"Sir," he said to Raphael after having gossiped for some time. "I think I can cure you of your malady. I now know enough of your constitution to affirm that the Paris doctors were deceived regarding the nature of your illness. Barring an accident, sir, you can live as long as Methuselah. Your lungs are as strong as the bellows of a forge, and your stomach would shame an ostrich. But if you remain in a high altitude, you risk being very promptly and rightly placed in sacred ground. Let me make myself more clear. Chemistry has revealed to us that breathing sets up in each man a veritable combustion, the intensity, more or less, of which depends on the abundance or the rarity of the phlogistic principles gathered by the organism. Phlogistic principles abound in you. You are, if I may express myself so, overcharged with oxygen because of your passionate nature. By breathing the pure air which supports the life of men of softer fibre you are accelerating a combustion which is already too rapid. One of your needs, therefore, is a thicker atmosphere, the atmosphere of the valleys of Germany, of Baden-Baden and Töplitz. The misty country of England, if you don't dislike it, should relieve your incandescence, but our waters, situated as they are a thousand feet above the level of the Mediterranean, are fatal to you. That's my advice. I give it, of course, against our interests, because if you follow it, we lose you."

If those last few words had not been uttered, Raphael might have been deceived by the false solicitude of the bland doctor. But he was too shrewd an observer not to detect from the accent, the gesture and the look which accompanied them the mission with which the young man had been charged by his patients. Raphael accepted the challenge, and even thought the intrigue against him quite amusing.

"Since you'll lose if I go," he told the doctor, "I'll put your advice into practice by staying here. I'll have a house built tomorrow in which the air shall be as you suggest."

The doctor appeared satisfied, particularly when a

friendly smile appeared on Raphael's face, and withdrew silently.

Bourget Lake is a vast group of notched and gleaming mountains seven or eight hundred feet above the Mediterranean. Seen from the top of Dent-du-Chat, the lake looks like a large turquoise gem. It is about nine leagues in circumference and, in some places, nearly five hundred feet deep. To be in the middle of that beautiful sheet of water under a beautiful sky, to hear only the sound of the oars, to see only an horizon of misty mountains and to admire the snow gleaming on Maurienne, to pass in turn from the walls of granite clothed in moss and ferns to smiling hills, from a desert to abundant nature, is at the same time a harmonious and discordant spectacle in which everything seems great and everything small. The mountains seem to change the perspective of everything. A fir tree a hundred feet in height looks like a reed, while the broad valleys appear to be mere footpaths. Nowhere else could one find a more beautiful blending between water, sky, mountain and earth. There was balm there for all the troubles in life. The place held the secrets of the unfortunate, it consoled and relieved them, and filled love with something which made it more profound and pure. But, above all, the lake was a place in which to reminisce in, everything seemed to be reflected in the mirror of its bosom.

Raphael could only endure his burden in the midst of this beautiful country, because it was here that he could remain indolent, dreaming and without desire. Soon after the doctor's visit he went for a walk and reached a deserted spot on a pretty hill, where the village of Saint-Innocent was situated. From here one could see the mountains of Bugey at the foot of which flowed the Rhône. But what Raphael loved to contemplate was the melancholy monastery of Haute-Combe, on the opposite shore, prostrated before the mountains like pilgrims who had reached the end of their journey. Suddenly, he heard the sound of oars, like the monotonous chanting of monks. Surprised to find any

one at that solitary part of the lake, the Marquis examined, without allowing his reverie to be disturbed, the persons who were seated in the boat and recognized the old lady who had spoken so harshly to him the previous evening. When the boat passed in front of him, only the girl companion of the woman condescended to recognise him. When they had disappeared behind the promontory he forgot all about them, but in a few minutes he heard light footsteps and the rustle of a dress. Turning around he saw the girl companion. From her manner he guessed she wanted to speak to him so he walked up to her. About twenty-six years of age, tall and slim, she was, as all old fashioned women like her would be, embarrassed. At the same time young and old, she expressed, by a certain dignity in her deportment, the high price which she attached to her beauty, and her discreet and monastic gestures revealed the woman who only loved herself.

"Sir, your life is in danger," she said, retreating a few steps as if her virtue had already been compromised, "don't visit the Cercle again."

"But, Madam," Raphael replied smiling, "since you have deigned to come here I . . ."

"If it wasn't for some good reason I would never have risked incurring the anger of the Countess," she replied, "if she only knows. . ."

"And who'd tell her, Madam?" Raphael asked.

"That's true," she said trembling. "But I must warn you that several young men who want to get rid of you have vowed to provoke you and force you to fight a duel."

The voice of the old woman echoed in the distance.

"Madam," said the Marquis, "I'm most grateful . . ."

But when she heard the voice of her mistress again, the girl fled.

"Poor girl!" thought Raphael sitting down at the foot of a tree.

The key to all knowledge is undoubtedly the interrogation mark. We owe most of our discoveries to How? and Wisdom in life perhaps consists in asking oneself Why?

But it must be admitted that such forced prescience also destroys our illusions. Thus Valentine having philosophically taken for the text of his vagabond thoughts the old fashioned girl's action, found them full of bitterness.

"There's nothing extraordinary about being loved by a lady companion," he said to himself. "After all I'm twenty-seven, have a title and two hundred thousand a year! But isn't it a strange thing that her cattish mistress should have brought her in a boat near me? Besides, both of them usually sleep till midday, and here they are out before eight o'clock."

Was the story of the duel only a fable, did they merely want to frighten him? Anyway, if they achieved nothing else, the two women succeeded in tickling his vanity, re-awakening his pride and exciting his curiosity. Not wishing to appear either a dupe or a coward, and rather amused, he visited the Cercle that very evening. Leaning against the marble chimney he looked tranquilly around at the assembly. Sure of his strength, he waited, like a mastiff, for the combat without any unnecessary barking. Towards the end of the evening he walked through the gaming salon and the billiard room and, from time to time, glanced at the young men who were gathered together in a corner. Although they spoke in whispers, Raphaël knew he had become the subject of a debate and occasionally caught some phrases which were spoken aloud.

"You?"

"Yes, I!"

"I defy you!"

"Shall we bet?"

"Oh, he'll do it!"

When Valentine, curious to know what the bet was over, walked nearer past them to overhear the conversation, a tall, stalwart young man with an attractive but unintelligent face, approached him.

"Sir," he said calmly, "I've been asked to draw your attention to something which you seem to ignore. Your entire person displeases everybody here, and me in part."

icular. . . You're too refined not to want to sacrifice yourself for the general good, I'm sure, and I beg of you not to visit the Cercle again."

"Such jokes," replied Raphael, "have been made more than once in the garrisons of the Empire, but I'm afraid it has become more than a joke now."

"I'm not joking," said the young man. "Your health will only suffer if you continue to stay here. The heat, the lights, the atmosphere of the salon would only injure you."

"And where did you study medicine?" Raphael asked.

"Sir, I was educated at Lepage, Paris, and studied under Cérissier, the king of the foil."

"There remains only one more degree for you to take," replied Valentine. "Study the code of politeness and you'll be a perfect gentleman."

The other young men, some smiling, others serious, emerged from the billiard room. Alone in the middle of that inimical crowd, Raphael strove to keep his sang-froid and not to give the least offence. But when his antagonist became particularly sarcastic, he said gravely:

"We're no longer allowed to strike a man, but I don't know how else to punish conduct as cowardly as yours."

"Enough! Enough! you can settle this tomorrow," said several young men intervening.

Raphael left the salon having accepted a rendezvous in a small prairie near the Bordeau Castle. Society had triumphed; he had either to keep the appointment or leave Aix.

The next morning at eight o'clock Raphael's adversary, accompanied by two seconds and a surgeon, was the first to reach the prairie.

"It's a beautiful day for a duel!" he exclaimed gaily, looking at the blue sky, the lake and the rocks. "I have only to touch him on the shoulder to put him to bed for a month, eh doctor?"

"A month at least," replied the surgeon. "But leave that willow tree alone, you'll make yourself tired."

• Suddenly they heard the sound of a carriage.

"Here he is," said the seconds, who saw an open barouche on the road drawn by four horses and led by two postilions.

"What a singular man!" exclaimed Valentine's adversary. "To come in a carriage to fight a duel . . .!"

In a duel, as in a game, the smallest incidents influence the minds of the antagonists. When the young man saw the carriage, a strange uneasiness assailed him as he waited impatiently for it to stop. Old Jonathas was the first to get out. He then supported his master out of the carriage, and showered on him the attentions which a lover usually lavishes on his mistress. Both of them were lost for some time in the footpath which separated the road from the prairie. When they reappeared, the sight of Valentine leaning on the arm of his old servant had a profound emotional effect on the four spectators. Pale but defiant, his head bowed and silent, Raphael seemed to walk like some person suffering from gout. Anyone would have taken both of them to be old men, one ravaged by age and the other by thought.

"I haven't slept at all!" Raphael told his adversary.

When the young man heard those words and the terrible look which accompanied them he trembled. He became conscious of his guilt and was secretly ashamed of his conduct. There was something strange in Raphael's attitude, voice and gesture. The silence was overwhelming.

"There's still time," said Raphael, "to apologise. If not you'll die. You rely on your skill, but I possess a power greater than any skill. To make your hand tremble and your heart palpitate, to destroy your skill utterly, I have only to desire it. But I don't want to use my power, it would cost me too much. You wouldn't be the only person to die. If, therefore, you refuse to apologise, your bullet will go into the lake and mine straight into your heart."

At that moment confused voices interrupted Raphael. All the while he had spoken, the Marquis had looked fixedly at his adversary.

"Tell him to keep quiet," said the young man, "his voice annoys me!"

"Please be quiet, sir, . . . it's quite useless," the surgeon and the seconds told Raphael.

"I'm only doing my duty by warning the young man," replied the Marquis.

"Enough! Enough!"

Raphael remained immobile, staring at his adversary, Charles, who, dominated by an almost magical power, looked like a bird before a serpent. A gradual fear assailed him.

"Give me some water . . . I'm thirsty . . ." he said to a second.

"You're not afraid?"

"I am," he replied, "that man's look seems to be burning me up."

"Do you want to apologise, then?"

"It's too late."

The two adversaries were placed at fifteen feet from each other. Near each was a pair of pistols, and according to the rules, they had to fire twice, but only after the signal had been given by the seconds.

"What's the matter, Charles?" one of the seconds said. "You're putting your bullet in before the powder!"

"I'm dead!" Charles whispered. "The sun's in my eyes . . ."

"It's behind you!" Valentine said in a solemn voice, slowly loading his pistol, neither disturbed by the signal which had already been given or taking care to adjust his aim.

There was something so terribly supernatural about the incident that even the postilions were affected. Raphael, confident of his power, or wanting to prove it, was talking to Jonathas at the moment he had to fire on his adversary. Charles' bullet struck the branch of a tree and then entered the lake, while the Marquis shot his opponent through the heart. He immediately took out his shagreen skin to

discover how many years it had cost him. The talisman was no bigger than an oak leaf.

"What are you looking at? Let's go!" the Marquis said to his gaping postilions.

He arrived that same evening in France and was soon on the road to Auvergne, to the waters of Mount Dore. During the journey one of those sudden illuminating thoughts, like a ray of light penetrating the misty obscurity of a valley, entered his mind. It seemed to unveil his shortcomings and left him feeling sorry for himself. What a thing the possession of power could be! To a child a sceptre is a toy, to Richelieu a hatchet and to Napoleon a lever with which to bend the world to his will. Power leaves small people as they are, only truly great can reap profit from it. Raphael had been given the power to do everything, and he had done nothing.

At the waters of Mount Dore, Raphael rediscovered the world which he loved but which had always escaped him. His last experience had made him profoundly disgusted with society and he instinctively felt the need to reconcile himself with nature, to share the real emotions and feelings of the life which abounded in the valleys and the mountains. The day after his arrival, he painfully clambered to the top of Sancy and visited the higher valleys, with its forgotten lakes and rustic cottages whose savage and rugged beauty had already begun to attract the brushes of modern artists. Sometimes he came across light, graceful scenes which contrasted vigorously with the sinister appearance of the desolate mountains. Hardly half a league from the village, Raphael found himself in a spot where nature, as happy as a child, seemed to have hidden all its treasures. When he saw the picturesque retreat he resolved to live there. He felt life must be tranquil there and as spontaneous as a plant.

The scene before him resembled an inverted cone, a wide cone of granite, a sort of shallow basin with jagged edges. There were bald vertical slabs, smooth and bluish in colour, on which the sun shone as on a mirror, wrinkled

rocks, broken up by cracks, on the top of which grew stunted trees that strained the wind, obscure redans on which stood a bouquet of chestnut trees as tall as cedars and yellowish grottos with gaping dark mouths wreathed in flowers and brambles. At the bottom of the valley, which was once perhaps the crater of a volcano, was a pool of pure water sparkling like a diamond. Around the deep basin, on the borders of which grew willows, gladiolus, ash and a thousand other aromatic plants, was a prairie which resembled an English bowling-green. Its fine grass was watered by the streams which filtered down the crannies of the rocks and enriched by the plants which were continually swept by storms down the sides of the mountains. The pool could not have been more than three acres in extent.

The prairie was an acre or two larger, though in some places it was so narrow as to hardly permit a cow to pass. At a certain height the vegetation ceased. The granite rocks took on the most bizarre forms and often caught those vaporous hues which made the high mountains vaguely resemble the clouds of the sky. In their nakedness and savage desolation they stood in such vigorous contrast with the graceful sweep of the valley that one of them had been called the Capuchin, so greatly did it resemble a monk. Sometimes, according to the position of the sun or the whims of the air, they turned gold or purple, rosy or dull grey, like the iridescence of the throat of a pigeon. At dawn or sunset, a ray of light often entered a crack, which might have been made with a fine hatchet, in a wall of lava, penetrated to the bottom of the smiling valley and danced about on the water, as a golden ray might pierce the shutters and cross a Spanish room which has been carefully closed for a siesta.

When Raphael reached this neglected corner of the earth he noticed several cows grazing on the prairie and, when he stepped forward towards the pool, he saw a modest cottage built out of granite and wood. The roof, in keeping with the surroundings, was covered with moss, ivy and flowers. A thick column of smoke, of which the birds were

no longer afraid, escaped from the ruined chimney. Near the door, a large bench was placed between two honeysuckle creepers. The walls were hardly visible under the branches of the vine and the bunches of roses and jasmin which crossed and recrossed each other at random. The inhabitants seemed to have left nature entirely to itself. Blankets hung from a currant-tree, a cat crouched on a machine which was used to scutch the hemp and a large cauldron that had recently been scoured lay in the middle of a heap of potato peels. The cottage resembled those nests which birds build so ingeniously in the hollows of rocks, an achievement which is at the same time full of artistry and indifference. When Raphael arrived, the sun's rays had penetrated every nook and corner of the scene and heightened the colours of the plants and trees, the yellow leaves, the red and white flowers and above all the clear pool, in which the granite rocks, together with the cottage and the sky, were reflected. Everything was a beautiful harmony of colour, from the shining speckled skins of the cows to the emerald coloured insects which buzzed on the fringes of the pool. A voluptuous feeling of satisfaction passed through Raphael.

But suddenly the barking of two dogs broke the profound silence. The cows lifted up their heads, turned their wet snouts towards Raphael, and, after having stupidly stared at him for a while, continued their grazing. Poised on a rock, as if by magic, were a goat and its kid who looked as if they were questioning Raphael. The barking of the dogs brought out a fat child, who stood gaping, followed by an old man with white hair. Both of them were in complete harmony with the country, the air, the flowers and the cottage. There was something primordial in every aspect of life there which exploded our stupid philosophies and cured the heart of its bloated passions. The old man looked like an ideal model for the virile brush of Schnetz. He had a brown wrinkled face, a straight nose and high cheek-bones which were veined like an old vine leaf. His hands, although they no longer worked, were hard. He

had the air of a really free man and made one feel that, in Italy, he would have perhaps become a brigand just for the love of his own liberty. The child, a true mountaineer, had black eyes that could stare unblinkingly at the sun, a swarthy skin and disordered brown hair. Through the holes in his garments one could see his skin. Both of them stood silently next to each other, moved perhaps by the same emotions and offering on their faces an identity of outlook on life. The old man looked as if he had adopted the frolics of the child and the child the humours of the old man in a sort of secret pact. Soon a woman, about thirty years of age, appeared at the door. She spun as she walked. She was an Auvergnian, her high colour, cheerful air and white teeth betrayed it; her face was Auvergnian, her coiffure and dress were Auvergnian and her speech was Auvergnian. She was a complete embodiment of the country of her birth, hard working, ignorant, economical and cheerful.

She entered into conversation with Raphael. The dogs slunk silently away, the old man sat on the bench in the sun and the child followed his mother everywhere she went, silent, but listening to and studying the stranger.

"You're not afraid to live here?"

"What should we fear, sir? Who can come here? We're not afraid! Besides," she added, leading Raphael into the cottage, "what can robbers take from us?"

On the walls, which were blackened by smoke, hung prints of the *Death of Trust*, the *Passion of Jesus Christ* and the *Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard*. There was an old bed, a table with twisted legs, some stools, a bread-pan, some bacon hanging from the ceiling, a stove and, on the chimney some yellow and discoloured plaster figures. When he was about to leave, Raphael saw, amongst the rocks, a man with a hoe in his hand looking curiously towards the cottage.

"That's our man," the Auvergnian said smiling. "He works up there."

• "And that old man, is he your father?"

"Oh, no, he's our man's grandfather. He's a hundred-and-two now. Recently he walked with our child to Clermont! He was a strong man, but now he only wants to sleep, drink and eat. He's always with the little fellow."

Valentine immediately resolved to live among them, to breathe the air which they breathed, to eat the bread they ate, to drink the water they drank and, if possible, to make their blood flow in his own veins. What whims the dying have! To preserve himself for a few more days from death was all that he wanted, and that ideal at the moment seemed to him the only formula of life, the only life, the true life. A profound egoistic thought entered his mind. In his eyes there was no universe, the universe was embodied in him. For people who are ill the world commences at the head and ends at the foot of their bed. The country in which he was was Raphael's bed.

Who has not, at least once in his life, examined the legs of an ant as it crawled up a wall, looked down the unique orifice of a slug or admired the thousands of veins, coloured like the windows of a Gothic cathedral, on the leaves of an oak tree? Who has not gazed at the combined effect of the rain and the sun on a tiled roof or contemplated the drops which fall from a rose tree and the flowers and the pinking of the calyx? Who has not plunged himself into those endless, lazy reveries which seem at first to lead nowhere? Who has not spent hours idling away his time like a child? That is how Raphael lived for several days. Free from cares or desires, an extraordinary well-being suffused his whole body, calmed his fears and allayed his sufferings. He clambered up rocks to peaks from which he commanded a view of the entire country. He would remain there for whole days, like a plant in the sun or a hare in its hole. He made himself familiar with every phenomenon of vegetable life, studied the everchanging sky and watched the progress of everything on land, water and air. He tried to associate himself with the intimate movement of nature, to identify himself with its passivity and to be ruled by the despotic and conservative law which governed its life. He

no longer wanted to be governed by himself. Like those criminals who, in olden times, were pardoned if they reached a church before the pursuing hands of justice caught them, Raphael tried to enter the sanctuary of life. He succeeded in becoming an integral part of that extensive and powerful fructification. He endured the inclemencies of the weather, accustomed himself to the rocks, learned the morals and habits of every plant and understood the animals. He was so perfectly in unison with the earth, that he seemed, in some measure, to have seized its soul and penetrated its innermost secrets. To him the infinite varieties around him were the developments of the same substance, the combination of the same movement, the embodiment of an immense being that lived, thought and grew, and with which he wanted to grow, think and live. Thanks to that mysterious illuminism, that artificial convalescence, Valentine tasted the pleasures of a second infancy during the first days of his stay in that smiling country. In his happiness he thought he was saved. But one morning, when he happened to stay in bed till late, plunged in a brown study in which realities became mere fantasies and chimeras realities, he heard, for the first time, his hostess giving Jonathas, who came every day, an account of his state of health.

"He's neither better nor worse," she said. "He still coughs . . . coughs and spits, it's a pity! We sometimes ask ourselves, my husband and I, where he gets the strength to cough like that. It's enough to break anyone's heart! How awful it must be! I'm always afraid of finding him dead in his bed in the morning. He's so pale and his body is so thin. And to see him running about one would think he was healthy and strong! He has a lot of courage, not to be afraid of death. But really death would be a relief, he suffers so much! I don't desire it, of course, it wouldn't be in our interest. All the same I think it would be best. Poor young man! He's so sure he won't die . . . but it's the fever that will kill him, he does not know that . . . but you mustn't cry because of that Monsieur Jonathas! You must

make a novena for him . . . I've seen wonderful cures through novenas"

Raphael's impatience grew as he listened to the Auvergnian. He rose quickly from his bed and appeared at the door.

"You old skeleton," he said to Jonathas, "do you want to be my hangman?"

The peasant woman, who thought she saw a ghost, fled.

"You needn't feel the least uneasiness about my health," continued Raphael.

"Yes, sir," said the old servant wiping his tears.

"And I think it would be much better if you did not come here unless I ask you to."

Jonathas wanted to obey his master but, before he retired, he threw the Marquis such a pitiful and compassionate look that Raphael could almost read his own impending death in it. Made suddenly aware of his own position, Valentine sat on the threshold, crossed his arms and lowered his head. Jonathas was frightened. He approached his master.

"Sir . . ."

"Go away! Go away!"

The next morning Raphael, after having clambered up the rocks, sat down in a moss-covered niche from where he could see the path which led to the cottage. Down below he saw Jonathas talking to the Auvergnian. By some malicious intuition he was able to interpret the despairing gestures of the woman, and sometimes it almost seemed as if he heard her fatal words. Horrified, he took refuge among the highest peaks of the mountains. He remained there till the evening but could not drive away the sinister thoughts which passed through his mind, the result of the cruel interest of which he had become the object. Suddenly, in the shadows of the evening, the Auvergnian herself appeared before him like a ghost.

"The dew is beginning to fall, sir," she said. "It's bad for you . . . you must return . . . and you've eaten nothing since this morning."

"Good God!" exclaimed Raphael, "If you don't let me live my own life I shall run away from here! If you must dig my grave every morning, at least leave me alone in the evening . . ."

"Your grave, sir! . . . Dig your grave! . . . I want to see you thriving like our father and not in the grave! The grave! We'll all go there soon enough . . ."

"Quiet!" said Raphael.

"Take my arm, sir."

"No!"

Pity is a sentiment which man endures with the greatest difficulty, particularly when he deserves it. Hatred is a tonic, it enlivens one, it inspires vengeance, but pity kills and weakens even our weakness. In the centenarian Raphael found a triumphant pity, in the child a curious pity and in the husband an interested pity, but no matter what form it took the sentiment seemed to him to be full of death. A poet turns everything into a poem, whether it be ugly or beautiful, according to the images which strike him at the moment, and his exalted soul always rejects the finer nuances for the more decided and outstanding colours. So pity produced in Raphael's heart a horrible poem of melancholy and sorrow. When he thought he was alone under some tree, grappling with some problem that eventually defeated him, he suddenly saw the shining eyes of the small boy, placed like a sentinel among some plants, watching him with that childish curiosity in which there seemed to be as much pleasure as pleasantry. The fact that he must die seemed always to be written in the eyes of the peasants with whom Raphael lived. He did not know what he feared more, their naïve words or their silence: both embarrassed him. One morning he saw two men, dressed in black, who were obviously watching and studying all his movements. Pretending to be out for a walk they spoke to him. He recognised them to be the priest and the doctor of the waters, probably sent by Jonathas or drawn there by the scent of approaching death. Raphael could clearly see his own funeral, counted the candles which were lit and heard

the chant of the priests. Even nature seemed suddenly to turn against him. Everything which once promised him a long life now prophesied a near end. The next day he left for Paris.

He travelled all night and woke up in the morning in one of the most beautiful valleys of Bourbonnais. He watched the scenery eddying before him, carried away like the vaporous images of a dream. Nature paraded before his eyes with cruel coquetry. Soon he was passing through Allier, with its hamlets modestly hidden in a gorge of yellow rocks, its monotonous line of vineyards and roads bordered by majestic poplars. And finally he was passing the long glittering ribbon of the river Loire. How attractive everything was! Raphael drew the curtains of his carriage and fell asleep. Towards evening, after having passed Cosne, he was suddenly awakened by the sound of loud music and found himself in the middle of a village feast. While his postilions attended to the horses, he watched the feast. He saw the peasants happily dancing together, the pretty girls decked in flowers, the excited young men and the red faces of the drunken old men. The young children frolicked, the old women spoke and laughed at the same time, and everybody and everything seemed to be in their Sunday finery, including the church, and the roofs and windows of the village. While he watched the scene, Raphael could hardly suppress a secret desire that it might stop and the clamour of the violins and the voices be stilled. He climbed sadly back into his carriage. When he turned around again the feast had broken up, the peasants were in flight and the benches empty. On the platform a blind fiddler continued to play a clamorous rondo. The rain fell in torrents. It was something so natural that, after having looked at the sky, it did not strike Raphael to look at his shagreen skin. He settled himself in a corner of the carriage and was soon on his way.

The next day he was at home. He felt cold and had ordered a large fire to be made. Jonathan brought him some letters. They were all from Pauline. He opened the

first leisurely and unfolded it as if it were a bill. He read the first sentence.

"You seem to have really fled, Raphael darling Nobody knows where you are! And if I don't who would?"

He could read no more. He took the letters and threw them into the fire, and watched with indifference the flame which twisted the perfumed paper. A few fragments rolled over to the side and he saw the beginning of certain phrases and words which he read mechanically.

"... seated here . . . waiting . . . a whim . . . I obey . . . rivals . . . I, no! . . . Your Pauline . . . loves . . . if you wanted to leave me eternal love . . . to die . . ."

These words caused in him a sort of remorse. He seized the tongs and saved a last shred of letter from the enveloping flames.

"I'm not reproaching myself, Raphael!" wrote Pauline. "By staying away from me you probably want to relieve me of some sorrow. One day you may kill me, but you're too good to make me suffer. Don't go away as you did ever again. Whatever sorrow you may have to endure, I'll share it with you. I can endure everything, except being without you. I don't know what . . ."

Raphael placed it on the mantelpiece and then suddenly threw it back into the fire. It was too vivid a reminder of his love for Pauline and his fateful life.

"Ask Bianchon to come here," he told Jonathas.

When Horace entered he found Raphael in bed.

"Can you mix me something with a little opium which would put me in a continual sleep and yet not make me ill?"

"Nothing is easier," replied the young doctor, "but you'll have to be awake for a few hours in the day to eat."

"A few hours?" said Raphael. "No, no! I want to be awake for only an hour at the most."

"But why?" Bianchon asked.

"To sleep is still to live," replied the Marquis. "Don't allow anyone in, not even Madame Pauline," he told Jonathas while the doctor was writing out the prescription.

"Is there no hope?" the old servant asked Horace.

"He'll either live for some time more or die this evening. The chances of life and death are equal. I don't understand it at all. I think he needs amusement."

"Amusement! You don't know him, sir! The other day he killed a man without as much as saying poof! . . . Nothing amuses him."

Raphael remained for some days plunged in the oblivion of his artificially induced sleep. He was reduced to the level of one of those lazy animals grazing in the heart of a forest, thanks to the opium. He did not even see the light of day, the sun never entered his room. He awoke at eight o'clock in the morning and, without being consciously aware of anything, he satisfied his hunger and then returned to bed. He was enslaved in profound silence, in a negation of *movement and thought*. One evening he awoke later than usual and found that his dinner had not been served. He rung for Jonathas.

"You may go if you want," he said angrily. "I've made you rich, you can be happy in your old age. But I don't want you to play about with my life . . . I'm hungry, you fool! Where's my dinner?"

Jonathas smiled to himself. He took a candle, whose light trembled in the profound obscurity of the immense rooms, led his master down a long corridor and then suddenly threw open a door. Raphael, inundated with light, was dazzled by an unexpected sight. His chandeliers were filled with candles and the rarest flowers from his hothouse were artistically arranged on the table, which sparkled with silver and gold plate, mother-o'-pearl and porcelain. A royal feast had been laid with smoking, appetising dishes which tickled the palate. He saw his old friends together with some ravishing women with naked shoulders, provoking and voluptuous smiles and brilliant shining eyes. The attractive forms of one was accentuated by an Irish jacket, another wore a lascivious Spanish petticoat, while another was dressed in a modest costume by Mademoiselle de la Vallière. The eyes of every guest shone with love, happiness and pleasure. When the sickly face of Raphael appeared

the door a sudden thunderous acclamation broke from the guests. The voices, the perfume, the lights and the beautiful women assailed all Raphael's senses and awakened his appetite. Beautiful music, which emerged from a neighbouring room, joined the tumult with a torrent of harmony and completed the strange vision. Raphael felt his hand being squeezed by a soft delicate hand, Aquilina's hand. It was then that he realised that the scene before him was not one of the vague and fantastic images which appeared in his dreams. He uttered a sinister cry, quickly closed the door and slapped his old servant on the face.

"You monster!" he shouted, "Do you want me to die?"

He had to summon up all his strength to return to his room, drank a strong dose of medicine and dropped asleep.

It was nearly midnight. At that hour Raphael, by one of those inexplicable physiological transformations which is the despair and wonder of medical science, looked resplendent in his sleep. His cheeks had taken on some colour and his forehead was as gracious as that of any young girl. Life seemed to be in flower on his tranquil face. You would have taken him for a young child sleeping under the protection of its mother. Sunk in a deep sleep he breathed effortlessly, while a smile wrinkled the corners of his mouth. Perhaps he was dreaming, perhaps he saw himself a centenarian surrounded by his grand-children, perhaps from a rustic bench under the sun he saw, like the prophet, the promised land...

"So there you are!"

These words, spoken in a low voice, dissipated the nebulous figures which peopled his dream. He awoke and, by the glimmer of the lamp, he saw Pauline seated on his bed. At the sight of her white face, which resembled the petals of a water flower, and long black hair Raphael was stupefied. A few tears had traced a shining path down her cheeks and stood suspended, as it were, waiting for the slightest movement to fall. Dressed in white, she looked like an angel, like an apparition that would disappear at any moment.

"I've forgiven you everything!" she said when she saw Raphael open his eyes. "Oh, darling, you've never looked so beautiful before! Your eyes... but I knew it all the time! You've been trying to regain your health... but you frightened me... darling..."

"Go, go away!" replied Raphael. "Go! If you stay I'll die! Do you want to see me die?"

"Die?" she repeated incredulously. "You can't die without me!... And you're young and I love you!"

Raphael drew out the shagreen skin from under his pillow. It was as small and fragile as a periwinkle leaf. He gave it to her.

"Pauline, my darling, say good-bye to me!"

"Good-bye?"

"Yes. That is a talisman which accomplishes my desires and represents my life. You can see what I have left. If you stay here I'll die..."

The young girl thought Raphael had become *insane*. She took the talisman and walked towards the light. She carefully examined Raphael and the last remaining piece of the magical talisman in turn. When Valentine saw Pauline looking so beautiful under the light he could no longer contain himself. The memory of former happy scenes overwhelmed his sleeping soul, and he seemed to burst into flame like a badly extinguished fire.

"Pauline! . . . Pauline! . . ."

The girl uttered a terrible cry, and her eye-brows were raised in horror when she read in Raphael's eyes one of his furious desires. And as the skin contracted as his desire grew, it tickled her hand. Without knowing what she was doing she fled to the next room and shut the door.

"Pauline! Pauline!" Raphael cried following her. "I love you, I adore you, I want you!... I shall hate you if you don't open the door!..."

Using some unaccountable force, the last spark of life perhaps, Raphael broke the door down and saw Pauline, half-naked rolling on the sofa. She had made a vain attempt to pierce her heart and, in order to put an end to herself,

as quickly as possible, she had taken a shawl with which to strangle herself. ^{W. U}

"If I die, he'll live!" she said trying to tighten the knot which she had made in the shawl.

Her hair was down, her shoulders bare and her clothes in disorder. In that struggle with death, her eyes filled with tears, she seemed to Raphael a thousand times more attractive. He threw himself on her with the ease of a bird of prey, tore the shawl away and took her in his arms. He tried to find words with which to express the desire which consumed his strength, but the rattling in his throat strangled them. In a few minutes he died in Pauline's arms.

A little later Jonathas entered frightened by the noise he had heard. He tried to drag away Raphael's body from the young girl who lay crouched in a corner.

"What are you doing?" she said. "He belongs to me. I've killed him, I predicted it!"

EPILOGUE

"And what became of Pauline?"

"Pauline? Have you sometimes sat, on a beautiful winter evening, before your hearth, voluptuously recalling memories of love or youth contemplating the flames on a piece of wood? Here the fire seems to design the red squares of a draught-board, there small blue flames run along the wood and seem to bound and frolic in the heart of the brazier. Suddenly an unknown hand sketches, among those flamboyant and purple tints, a supernatural face of extreme delicacy, a fugitive phenomenon that will never appear again. It's a woman. Her hair is brushed back by the wind and her features breathe a delicious passion. She smiles and disappears. Good-bye, flower of the flame!"

"But what about Pauline?"

"Weren't you listening? I'll start again. Place! Place! Here she is, here comes the queen of illusions, the woman who passes as lightly as a kiss and is as fast as a flash of lightning, a spontaneous being, all spirit and all love! She is wreathed in flame and her forms are as pure as any being in heaven. Isn't she as resplendent as an angel? Can't you hear the flutter of her wings? With her terrible and fascinating eyes she alights near you as lightly as a bird, and her sweet but powerful breath attracts your lips to hers by an almost magical force. You want to touch her snowy body and golden hair and to kiss her shining eyes. You thrill in every nerve and are full of desire. And when at last you've touched her lips, you suddenly awaken. Ah! Ah! you find your head in a corner of the bed and your arms around the posts with its cold bronze gildings!"

"But, sir, what about Pauline?"

"What! Pauline? Listen. One beautiful morning a young man, holding a pretty girl's hand, leaves for Tours. Suddenly, below the waters of the Loire, they see a white

figure through the fog. And, as they watch, the sylph leaps into the air. It walks among the islands, shakes its head across the tall poplars, soars over the hamlets and the hills and seems to defy the boat to pass the Castle of Ussé."

"I understand now. What about Feodora?"

"Oh, Feodora! You'll meet her somewhere . . . She was at the Buffons yesterday and she'll probably be at the opera this evening—she's everywhere! She is, if you like, pretty."

THE END